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My Legacy: Blessings, Love and Courage

A Memoir

by

Klaus Stern

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My Legacy: Blessings, Love and Courage

a memoir by Klaus Stern

With special thanks for preparation and editing

Miriam Greenbaum, Delila Simon, Laurie Warshal Cohen, Manny Frishberg

in gratitude for the gracious donation of printing and design

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My Legacy: Blessings, Love and Courage

By Klaus Stern

a survivor of the Holocaust

Seattle, Washington 2007

Dedication

My story, or better, our story, is in memory of our families,
relatives and friends who were with us before,
but weren't as lucky as we were and didn't survive the Holocaust.

When an 86-year-old man finally tells his story: marriage in 1942, deportation nine months later with his young wife to Auschwitz and other camps, their survival even though they did not see each other for twenty eight months, and each did not even know if the other was alive, is there a better way to say it than "better late than never?"

I tell my story as well as I can still remember it as my legacy. It is a legacy of blessings, love and courage.

My name is Klaus Stern. I was deported with my wife, Paula, on the 19th of April 1943, one day before Hitler's birthday, with a group of about 1,000 people. As soon as I arrived in Auschwitz, I was torn apart from my wife. I received a tattoo on my left front arm, with the number 117033. Later I found out that out of our transport of 1,000 only 299 men and 158 women made it directly into the camp. The rest were gassed right away.

But let's start from the beginning…

For the sixtieth anniversary of liberation of Auschwitz by the Russian Army, in 2005, I was asked to appear on "KCTS Connects" with Enrique Cerna by the Co-Executive Director of the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center, Miriam Greenbaum.

After I appeared on television, she asked me, "Why don't you, Klaus, write your life story? It would be interesting to hear."

I said, "I have no patience to sit down with a typewriter and look everything over. No, I have no more patience."

"Oh, don't worry about it," she said. A few days later she came to my house, brought a tape recorder, large speakers, batteries, and tapes and said, "Here you are."

So I sat down with a few notes from some things I remember and some things my parents used to tell me and here I am starting to give the best picture of what I remember.

Family Background

After my parents got married they settled in Berlin, Germany. On my father's side we were all merchants coming from Bochum, Germany. My father, Alfred Stern, had three brothers: a twin brother Eugene, then Paul, and the youngest one was Robert. Robert left this life fighting in World War I against the French. All my uncles and my father were decorated with the Iron Cross, which was at that time a big thing. My father was always proud of his decoration. He was quite a proud man, and he said, "I fought for the Emperor, the Kaiser. I have fought for the Fatherland, for Germany." And, when Hitler came to power, he thought, "He's not going to do anything to me, after all I was a good German. I did my part when it came to defend Germany."

My mother, Hedy (Hedwig) Stern (nee Nossen) was born in Freiburg, Germany and came from an academic family. There was a doctor, a pharmacist, and an architect; two of her sisters were married to very prominent dentists in Breslau and Beuthen.

Shortly before I was born in 1921, my mother went back to Breslau

where my Grandma Johanna lived and where one of my uncles was a doctor. So, when I was born, my uncle, Herman Nossen delivered me, and my grandmother took good care of me. After a few weeks or months, my mother went back to Berlin and there we had a nanny. I think I remember, Mrs. Pakosh. She took care of me and later on my sister, Renate, who was born in September 1925.

Before the War

We lived in a big apartment house in Berlin on 30 Tile Wardenberg Street and we were very friendly with the neighbors. There were: the Muellers, the Arndts, the Rothschields, the Knopps and the widow Roethke. We were all very close and the manager of the house was Mr. Garduhn. He took care of all the apartments. Everything was fine and dandy.

My father was a representative for a very big raincoat outfit and he traveled quite a bit within Germany. My father's boss was a very decent man. He kept him on as long as possible. I remember when Christmas came along, the boss had a beautiful villa near Berlin. He invited all the employees to come to celebrate with him. In Germany they celebrate Christmas for two days, two days for Easter, and two days for Pentecost. The first day, my father's boss had a celebration just with his family, but on the second day he invited all his employees and their families to come to his beautiful villa. There was a reception; the kids got gifts and everything. Really. that man was a good guy and my father worked as long as was possible for him.

My father belonged to many organizations, one was the Reich Union of Jewish Frontline Soldiers, the RJF. This was a veterans organization founded in 1919.The Frontline Soldiers from World War I came together once a month. They had meetings, sometimes dinners and dances, Hanukkah dances, Purim Balls and so on. I remember one when I was a little bit older my parents took me to a Purim Ball or a Hanukkah Ball and they won one of the prizes for the dance contest. They were very good dancers, so I think I inherited a little bit from my parents.

My mother told me she was a star in school plays and other plays. She had a beautiful voice. In the mornings when she got dressed she would sing something from an opera or operetta when she was happy. But, then in the mornings when she got dressed and she sang a sad song, we knew we kids had better be good; otherwise we were going to get it. So, we could tell when my mother was in a good or bad mood.

1933

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Within a few weeks the first thing they did was start erecting the prison camp, Dachau, south of Munich (later to become a concentration camp). A few weeks later, they started with the Gestapo (the secret police). By the end of March, the German Parliament, the Reichstag gave Hitler's government dictatorial powers. In April 1933 there was a boycott against Jewish stores. Little by little German Jews were isolated. As a young boy I experienced this in many ways; for instance, every December the manager got a check from my parents for Christmas and Mr. Garduhn came from door to door and wore a Santa Claus outfit, brought us candy and nuts, everything. Jewish boys were like any boys, but after Hitler took over we were isolated.

We lived in a big apartment house and there was one widow, Mrs. Brinke. My mother did many good things for her, like shopping sometimes. When Hitler came to power, the friendly neighbors we knew for years and years gave us the silent treatment. Only one was very nice about it. Mrs. Brinke came and said something like: "I'm very sorry, Mr. and Mrs. Stern. You know what's going on. I can't greet you anymore. I can't do much with you anymore. After all I have to be like everybody else." Later on my parents moved out and got a smaller apartment in Berlin, Charlottenburg. That was that.

How life changed

Even as things became difficult for us, I remember, when I walked with my mother on the street, and we saw a blind man or handicapped person my mother always opened her purse and took out a few pennies or this or that. I said, "Mother, look here, after what the Nazis do to us, you still give some money to those people." My mother used to say, "What do those people know about Hitler? That man is blind or that guy's handicapped. He's happy to be alive." I didn't like it at the time, but my mother kept on doing it. And, I must say there is a certain trait left over. Every time I go downtown and I see a blind man or a handicapped man, automatically my hand goes into my pocket and I give him a few pennies or quarters because I remember my mother used to do that too. It's a good thing to do. It's a *mitzvah* to do.

My father also belonged to different organizations, and between 1934 and 1935 he got letters from the organization. "We don't need you anymore as a member. Don't renew your membership. We don't want any

Jews in our midst." So, my father said, "Well, it's not the worst thing on earth." So, little by little we were isolated.

Sometimes on Sunday I went with my friends to the movies and saw for instance Tom Mix. He was a big thing at the time, or Charlie Chaplin or Pat and Patterchon; they were like Laurel and Hardy. We had a good time. But, later on when I was older I went more or less for the romantic pictures. There was once a movie, "Song of the Night," with Jan Kiepura, a very famous Polish tenor. Or another big picture was "The Congress Dances" with Lilian Harvey, an English actress. I liked the picture so much I went twice to see it. I liked the music and the acting, so I saw that here too, in the United States. I went to see "Gone with the Wind" twice because I really liked it and "The Great Waltz," the life of Johann Strauss. I would sit there and just listen to the music. But, when Hitler started with his program against the Jewish people and other minorities, two famous singers, Jan Kiepura and Lilian Harvey, refused to make any more pictures in Germany and they left Europe. You never saw any pictures with either one in Germany again. They moved to the United States.

My uncle, Herman, the youngest brother of my mother, was a doctor. I saw him the last time in 1934. Uncle Herman had to leave Germany in 1937. He was alienated by some other doctors, went to Austria, got married in Austria and then he went from Austria to Kovno (now Kaunas), Lithuania. Between 1920 and 1939 Kovno was the country's capital and largest city. He was the head surgeon in Kovno. Then the Nazis came, and he had to leave everything behind. He had enough time to take his *tallit* and *tefillin* and some surgery instruments. He went to Shanghai to Cairo, Egypt, from Cairo to Seattle. A long, long trip.

In 1934 I had my Bar Mitzvah. Here my relatives came from all over, from Breslau, from Duelken (Rheinland) and from Beuthen. I felt really good. I was in the center of everything. I got some nice gifts. I got cameras, fountain pens, books, watches, and everything else. But, the nicest thing I got was from my Grandmother Johanna, my maternal grandmother. I got a nice gold ring with my initials. She gave one to all the other cousins I had, Fred, Rudy, Heinz and Horst. It was her gift for a Bar Mitzvah. I wore that ring, as long as I could, until I was deported to Auschwitz. That was the nicest gift I received.

In summertime I went with my sister to visit my paternal grandfather, Leeser Stern, who had a manufacturing business in a small town, Duelken in Rhineland. He had a nice big store, in a three-story building and a nice, big yard. When he got too old, my uncle Paul, the youngest, took over. My Uncle Paul and Aunt Alma had four children: Bertha, Ruth, Fritz and

Edith. I was one day older than Edith. We went swimming, we had a good time and after a few weeks, we went back to Berlin.

My school friends were Heinz Rothchild and Herbert Arndt. But, my best friend was a non-Jewish boy, Walter Loeser. His parents had a big restaurant and the step-mother would say "You are old enough, why don't you help us before you go out to play in the park with the other boys." So, I went there everyday before I went to play soccer and other sports. I helped my good friend clean up at the restaurant, then my friend's step-mother would come and say, "Beat it, go do whatever you want to do." I did that for many years and we were close like brothers.

The biggest shock I experienced was when my friend Walter came to me and said, "Klaus, I can't play with you anymore." I said, "What are you talking about. We are best friends. We are like brothers. We do things every weekend. We swim and play and do everything else together. What's the matter with you? What did I do to you?" He said, "You didn't do anything to me." I said, "No, what is the reason? Why don't you want to play with me anymore?" "Well, let me explain … You know my parents have that restaurant and if anybody sees me playing with a Jewish boy, my parents might lose their business. I'm sorry I can't play with you anymore." Here I lost my best and closest friend, Walter, because I was Jewish and he had to join the Hitler Youth. When you are about 13 years old that is a big shock to you. It was my first bad experience and it took me a long time to get over it.

Around the Christmas season in 1934, the biggest musical in Berlin was "Ball in Savoy" which is something like, "My Fair Lady." Everybody went to see it. Hitler took some of his cabinet members to see it at the Metropol, the biggest theatre in Berlin. The story was told that after the performance some of his men said to him, "Mr. Hitler, I would like to tell you, the biggest stars of that musical are Jewish." And Hitler was said to have turned around and said, "I don't care whether they are Jewish or not Jewish, I had a hell of a good time." Hitler's answer was in all the papers the next morning in Berlin; *The Morgen Post*, the midday paper. Boy, did he change his mind about the Jewish people later on.

My mother was told in many stores, "You don't have to come back to our stores. We don't need your business. Go somewhere else and buy whatever you need. Just forget about coming to us."

Learning a trade

Now came the time to learn a trade. In Autumn 1935, my father got a call from an uncle in the Duelken telling him that an acquaintance of

his had a son who just finished learning a trade, window trimming and salesmanship in Aurich, northwest Germany. They were looking for a new employee.

My father said, "You know it is better to go to a small town and learn a trade, than Berlin. Berlin, they put you in one place and you learn one thing and that's it. In a small town you have to do everything, from window trimming to salesmanship. We decided it's best for you to go Aurich and go into salesmanship."

Aurich had about 5,000-10,000 people. About 400 people were Jewish and they were very religious, very Orthodox. On Saturday and holidays all the stores were closed and on Sundays the nearby farmers from outside towns came and brought stuff from the farms like eggs and butter to the backdoor to trade for some merchandise they needed. I had room and board with the Goldschmidts' company. I was to learn bookkeeping, window trimming and merchandising. It was a nice town to begin with.

When I went the second time to synagogue, the *shamash* came to me and said, "Hey you with your *yarmulke* on. Didn't you have your Bar Mitzvah?"

I said, "Yes, I had my Bar Mitzvah."

"Listen," he said, "anybody who has had a Bar Mitzvah has to wear a hat. Never mind this *yarmulke*, that's for little kids." So, I was 15 or 16 years old and I had to go and buy a hat. I didn't buy a black hat, it was brown or gray. The next Shabbat morning I came to synagogue with the hat and the *shamash* said, "Now you look like everybody else."

After the Nuremberg Laws

In September of 1935, the first of a series of decrees called the Nuremberg Laws came out. Everything changed. We were made second-class citizens. Anti-semitism was very much felt. Sometimes the Hitler Youth pushed us from the sidewalk. I remember when I had to go to trade school which was twice a week, the Hitler Youth would always give me a bad time. Every time when I went to school I worried all night long. The boys would tease me and push me around.

In 1936, the Olympic Games were held in Berlin. All the signs which became part of our daily life, like "The Jews are our misfortune," or, "This place forbidden for Jews; Jews are not allowed," suddenly disappeared. Hitler fooled the rest of the world. When the people came to visit Berlin everything was fine and dandy after all nothing was showing anymore. As soon as everyone left, the games were over, the signs were found in stores: "This place forbidden for Jews, we don't want Jews. The Jews are our

misfortune." In 1936 for a few weeks in the summertime when the games were held, everything was fine and dandy, but then it started all over again.

Sometimes my mother took me to a good acquaintance of hers, Mrs. Herschel. She was a French lady and she spoke wonderful "Salon French;" that's the top French. In 1936 she was asked by the Gestapo to go to Paris as a spy for Germany. She would get a free apartment and plenty of money to dress herself nicely because she could not wear the same dress when she went to the famous parties.

She got out of it when they found out that her son, who was about my age, had tuberculosis.

She would say to my mother, "That's the only way I got out of it. How can I, as a Jewish woman work for the Gestapo and go to Paris and spy for the Gestapo?" When I think of my mother I always think of French. I think French is a beautiful language. I wish I could speak it. I would listen to them talking back and forth, and I really think it's the nicest language.

1938: The end of schooling

In 1938, the law came all over the country, from elementary school to high school, later on college and universities. Jews were expelled from schools all over Germany and later in Austria too. I got an official letter from the city, from the superintendent stating that according to the law I was expelled from trade school. I had to leave along with a number of other Jewish guys from the classrooms. The other students at the school treated us badly. They called us names, bullied and threatened us. Although I didn't want to quit my studies, I must tell you I was relieved.

The people in Aurich were nice to me, but on October 1, 1938 my time was over. I had learned the trade as well as I could so I left about the end of October. I went back to Berlin. In Berlin I didn't have too much trouble finding a job. I went to the business district and there were many wholesale houses and I found a job with Joseph Becker Co. It was an underwear business and we had two shifts from 8-4 and from 9-5. At least I had a job. My new boss, Mr. Becker, was a very religious Jew. Every morning he came in a little bit earlier than everyone else. He put on his *tallit* and *teffilin;* nobody could bother him in the office. Lunchtime his mother came and brought him cooked kosher food. He wouldn't eat anywhere else. We knew to respect him enough; after all he was the boss. We did our job and everything was fine. At the beginning of 1939 Mr. Becker was gone. He had left overnight with his family for Palestine.

Today when I go to different schools, students want to know how

the Nazis were able to pick up Jews or take them to the camps; there was an old law from before Hitler had come to power that all Germans, Christians, Jews, whatever, had to register at the nearest police station. You had to put down your name, place/date of birth, age, and in our case write your religion. It didn't matter where you lived, a home, or an apartment house if you moved to another location you had to fill out another form. That just shows you how bureaucratic Germany was at that time.

In 1938 we got another ordinance against the Jewish people. We had to go to the nearest police station for a brand new identification card. So, I took my younger sister with me and we went to the police station. We were fingerprinted like criminals and we were told to come back in three days.

My little sister kept wondering, "Why are they doing that to me, I haven't done anything wrong?" I just told her, "Just do what everybody else does."

Three days later we came back and I got my card with a big "J" for Jew and all of a sudden I had a middle name. What the Nazis did, they went back to the Bible and chose two names, *Israel* for the men and *Sarah* for the women. So, my full name was now, Klaus Israel Stern and my younger sister's name was Renate Sarah Stern. That was to identify us which meant later on when the war started whenever you need to go for groceries with your card you always had to go to the back of the line. First came our German citizens. By the time I got to the front bread, butter, eggs were gone for the day and I had stood there for nothing.

At the end of October 1938, another ordinance was passed. All Polish Jews, or stateless Jews, had to leave Germany within a few days and go back to Poland where they came from. There were Jewish people who had lived in Germany for many years, who went to schools, colleges, and universities. They had businesses, nobody ever bothered them before. When they came to the Polish border, the Polish government told them they had lived in Germany and they didn't have Polish passports. They had to go back to where they came from. These people didn't know where to go, back and forth. Finally Germany and Poland created a settlement and put those people in what was called "no-man's land." These people were temporarily put in dirty, unheated old military barracks.

Before Kristallnacht

One Jewish family, the Grynszpan family from Hannover (one of the biggest cities in Germany), had a business and a home. How can anyone sell a business or a home within a few days? That's exactly what Hitler wanted. If you couldn't sell your business or home the Nazis took them over without paying one penny. We soon learned that their son, Hershel, living in Paris, heard the news and went to the German embassy to kill the German ambassador. He could not find the ambassador. When Herschel came to the office of the third secretary, Ernst Von Rath, he shot him twice. After two days Von Rath died. When the news came over the radio, (the Jewish people were still allowed to have radios and telephones until 1939) my father said, "Oh my goodness. That means only trouble for us." And, sure enough that happened.

The Nazis completed the first concentration camp in Dachau, near Munich. The Nazis later erected more detention and concentration camps such as: Oranienburg Sachsenhausen near Berlin. By 1938 Weimer/ Buchenwald and Neuengamme were operational. Bergen Belsen, where Anne Frank died just a few weeks before liberation, opened in 1943.

Soon as the news came on November 8th that Von Rath died in Paris, Hitler was informed by Goebbels and other men. This had provided him with an excuse to do something with the Jewish people all over Germany and Austria.

Kristallnacht

From the 9th to the10th of November 1938, *Kristallnacht* – "the night of the broken glass" happened. That was the real beginning of the Holocaust. Over a two day period (November 9-10), 30-35,000 Jewish men, aged 18-65, were arrested and brought to the different concentration camps. There was hard labor, marching, torture, and some of the older people died. The families would get a telegram: "pick up the body; your husband had a heart attack, so make your own arrangements." It wasn't true; they beat him to death or mishandled the people.

My father, as a representative for a very big raincoat outfit, traveled quite a bit within Germany. Sometimes he was gone for several days, which may have saved him from being arrested in 1938 during *Kristallnacht.* He was lucky to be out of the house when the Nazis came to look for him and other people.

I was told that on November 9th, 1938, when the Nazis came to break the windows and loot the stores, friends of my Uncle Paul came and stood

in front of the show windows and challenged the Hitler Youth. "Don't you dare throw rocks against the windows. If you throw rocks that means you could hit us and don't you dare." So, nothing happened to the windows and nothing was looted because of the neighbors; some were comrades from WWI. My grandfather's business was saved. At that time, in a small town, you didn't know who was your friend, but we were lucky.

On the very day, November 9th, 1938, I had the early shift from eight to four o'clock. When I left the business to go on the electric train to go home to my parents, I heard the shattering of glass. I saw the brown shirts of the Nazi uniforms running through the streets, breaking the windows of the Jewish businesses. I saw some small furniture falling out onto the street, falling out of the windows into the street like chairs, lamps, and heard screaming.

I ran back to my boss and said, "You better close the business. The Nazis are after us." Then I went back to the train. In Berlin, the skies were blood red. You know sometimes when you go home you see a fire here and there, in the evening sometimes there are some reddish skies but Berlin looked like there was fire all over.

On the way home I knew exactly what happened. As soon as orders came, earlier in the day, of what to do with the Jewish people, some of the Nazis went to the temples and synagogues, forced the janitors or caretakers to open their doors. They poured some gasoline over the seats, and threw a match to it. Many, many temples and synagogues over Berlin, Germany and Austria went up into flames. Our closest synagogue was saved because of its location on Levetzow Street next to the German Academy of Art. They were afraid of the fire spreading to the next building. Later that synagogue was used as a collection center for people who were caught and deported to the concentration camps and forced labor camps in the East.

The most beautiful synagogue, on Fasanen Street, was in ruins the next morning. It was terrible. At home my parents and I were wondering, "What else could the Nazis think of to do to us? I wonder how the neighbors feel about it."

Some neighbors said, "Well Hitler went too far. If you destroy houses of worship, it's too far. Hitler went too far." That's all they could say. The next day we waited for the big powers, and wondered what are they going to say about it? England and France were the big powers, but they didn't say anything, at least openly. We all believed that when Hitler and his regime saw that the world kept silent, he thought, nobody cares for the Jewish people. Now we can go ahead with our program.

The next day after all of the excitement had died down, I went to the

synagogue on Fasanen Street; the synagogue was almost completely burned down, only the arch which held the Torah scrolls was still standing, and the Nazis were all over inside. I tried to climb up onto the arch so I could take one of the scrolls home to save it, but I was stopped by the Nazis.

They said; "Don't you touch that stuff! It's the work of the devil!" So I couldn't even save one of the Torahs.

Round-ups

After this I went to the apartment of my relatives (a cousin of my mother). She had just lost her husband and lived with two of her brothers. In the afternoon the doorbell rang and two men from the Gestapo had come to ask; "Where are your two brothers?"

She told them, "My brothers? They are still at their office; they are in the underwear wholesale business." One of the Gestapo men ran to the telephone and called my uncle saying, "Hallo! How are you?" My uncle must have said "Who are you?" He answered that he was a good friend, "we haven't seen each other in a long, long time, why don't you rush home, you may be surprised."

My uncles did not come home. We all waited a long, long time before one of the men told the other Gestapo; "Why don't we go now? We have some other work to do, and come back later on." As soon as they left, my relative took all of the money she could find in the apartment, and packed two suitcases with things like pajamas and shaving sets. She told me to run to the subway stop off of Kurfuerstendamm Street and tell her brothers not to come home. So I took the suitcases and went to the subway station, and a few minutes later her brothers came, so I gave them the suitcases and money.

I said "don't ask any questions, don't come home, the Gestapo is after you." Then I ran back to my relative. Soon the Gestapo came again and they asked, "So where are your two brothers?"

"Oh they haven't come home yet."

"Oh that's alright, maybe somebody else took them in the meantime."

Then they turned to me and asked "how old are you?"

"Seventeen-and-a-half."

"Oh are you lucky! If you would have been eighteen, we would have taken you instead of your relatives."

A letter to Montana

After *Kristallnacht*, every few days there came another ordinance against the Jewish people. We had only certain hours to go shopping, we had to be off the street at a certain time. We couldn't go to the theater, concerts, or sports events. We could only use the streetcar back and forth to work. Another ordinance came, all Jewish stores had to be sold or "Aryanized" by the 31st of March, 1939.

Finally, my dad saw the green light. He realized it was high time to get out of Germany. So my mother wrote a letter to Butte, Montana and asked her uncle and aunt for an affidavit.

There is a story behind this letter. In 1910 when my mother was a young girl, she left with my grandmother and went to Butte, Montana to see, my grandmother's brother, Jacob Pinkus. My great-uncle left in his twenties for America and got married to an American woman. He opened up a business in Montana, a jewelry business and watch repair shop. My mother accompanied my grandmother to Butte, Montana.

My mother at the time was a beautiful young woman. She could have stayed and married an American man, but my grandmother always said, "A good German-Jewish girl marries only a good German-Jewish man and you come home with me and that's it." My mother was a young woman, she went back, and that was it.

After we received the affidavit from my great aunt and great uncle in Butte Montana, my parents went to the American consul in Berlin, but they got a very high number. The United States let only 25,000 German-born immigrants a year into America. In Germany we had about 450,000-500,000 Jewish people and about 300,000 had emigrated by *Kristallnacht*. Many fled the Reich without their possessions to anywhere that would take them. So with the high application number we got, it would have taken at least a year to get the rest of the papers in order to come to America.

The *Kindertransport*

The only country who really cared for us was England. The British parliament agreed to take in 10,000 Jewish children from Germany from the age of about 7 to16.

So, as soon as news came out, that 10,000 Jewish boys and girls could come to England, the Reich representation of German Jews (Jewish Federation) in Berlin sent out flyers and letters to Jewish people and parents all over Germany and Austria. "If you want to save your child, bring your child to Berlin and we will bring your child to England." That was more a

political move because in the summer of 1938 Hitler asked Chamberlain and the French prime minister to come to Munich to sign a peace treaty and of course they were very willing to sign a treaty. They didn't want more war in their lifetime. They went to Munich and signed the paper. Chamberlain went back to England. But, six weeks after the peace pact was signed, Hitler went into Slovakia and took another part. When Chamberlain saw what Hitler did, he thought himself a fool. He had signed a peace pact with Hitler and look what Hitler does six weeks later. Hitler comes and captures another piece of land from Slovakia, what a fool.

Chamberlain was thinking; if England would let 10,000 Jewish boys and girls come in, how about the big United States. They can let at least 25,000 kids in.

We heard there was a conference, the Evian Conference in France where delegates from thirty two countries met to address the Jewish refugee problem. At the conference, most countries including the United States and Great Britain did not agree to admit refugees into their countries. The German government responded to the Evian Conference with great pleasure, noting that foreign countries criticized Germany for their treatment of the Jews but none of them wanted to open the doors to the Jews when given the "opportunity." England was the only one that did anything for the Jewish people at the time.

Parents of children from all over Germany came to Berlin and there was a little train station outside of Berlin, in Gruenewald. The train was waiting for the children to be transported to England. The children said good-bye to the parents, and the parents said goodbye to their children. Most of the children never saw their parents again. Some of the children would write a letter or card to their parents. After months, the cards or letters often came back with a rubber stamp, "address unknown", which means the parents were picked up and brought to a concentration camp. So, the children never saw their parents again. My sister was just at the right age, she could have joined the *Kindertransport*. But my dad said at the time, "We are one family, you are going to stay here and whatever happens we fight as one family. You stay here, it's best for you."

Becoming a farmer

After the closing of all the Jewish business in Germany the Jewish *Gemeinde* or Federation in Berlin opened up workshops. You had a chance to become a carpenter, a mechanic, whatever you wanted to do. At least you had training for the future.

My father had an English cousin in London. He asked him if there was

a chance for me to get a permit, or at least one of the family to get out to England. The cousin wrote back, England needs farmers. If I could get training in Germany as a farmer and get a certificate, I could eventually come to England. He would be willing to get me a permit for England. I heard there was a Jewish training farm about 80 miles east of Berlin near Fuerstenwalde which belonged to two German-Jewish brothers who left for America in time. They gave the farm in trust, to the Jewish Federation of Germany, as a training farm known as *Hachsharah*, for people who wanted to go to Palestine, Argentina, Santo Domingo or Australia. I decided that would be the right thing for me to do.

I made my application at the Jewish Federation to go to the farm in late spring which they officially called Neuendorf-im-Sande.

Neuendorf was a big estate, I don't know exactly how many acres, all I remember is they had about forty milk cows and a bunch of calves, about a half a dozen horses, 3,000 chickens, and about forty pigs. There was also a nursery. There was plenty of work for everybody.

There were about 200 young Jewish men and women and only a few older ones. The youngest group was a Zionist group. We had a religious group, *Agudah*. We all had in mind to get out of Germany as soon as possible.

I had received a permit to go to England on October 1st, 1939. Of course, September 1st, 1939, the Second World War started and no one could leave Germany for England. All my plans for the future fell apart. I stayed on the farm. What else was there for me to do?

Before the war I went many times to Berlin to see my family, but a few months after the war started the Nazis Farmers Association confiscated the farm and traveling was not easy anymore. Whenever possible, in our free time we would attend our services. One man had all kinds of classical records, so one Saturday night or Sunday afternoon we were sitting in a dining room, listening to all kinds of records: Caruso, or other operas. One woman had all the dance records you could think of. At night she would play all the Jewish dance music and dance. We played ping-pong or a bunch of us played soccer in our free time. We tried to make the best of it, but we didn't know what was really going on at the time.

Every year in Germany at the end of October, they have a holiday called *Erntedankfest*, which is something like Thanksgiving. Every year the German administrator called the meeting together and people with outstanding work performance got a so-called "blue book." One of those years I was mentioned for my work performance. I felt pretty good about it. After all I had received a blue book.

Paula comes into my life

Once in a while we received more young people, young men and women from other training programs which were closed. I remember we also had a group in the early 1940s from the last boat going to Palestine. In the fall of 1940 another group left for Santo Domingo. That was the last group that left from our farm. In November 1940, a young woman by the name of Paula Schaul came to Neuendorf and she turned out to be my future wife.

In June of 1941 Hitler's army invaded the Soviet Union. Hitler and Stalin had a non-aggression pact, but Hitler launched a surprise attack against the Soviet Union. The German troops were so powerful they took one state or province after another. When they came to the Ukraine, Hitler took many of the men, mostly farmers or peasants and brought them back to Germany. Little by little, Ukrainian farmers took over all the jobs in different towns all over Germany and Austria.

In September 1941 came another order. We had our special identification cards with the big "J" in our pockets and "Israel" as our middle name, but many Jewish people looked like everyone else so the Nazis had decided to make us wear the yellow stars on our jackets to identify us. Wherever we went on the street or whatever we did we had to have this yellow star sewn onto our outside jackets.

At end of 1941 I had a case of appendicitis. I was rushed to Berlin to the Jewish hospital on Iranische Street. When I arrived I was put into a room with twenty other patients. The chief surgeon came and looked me over and right away ordered surgery. Here I found out my appendix had burst already and I was more gone than alive. I had to stay for some time in the hospital. When I came back to Neuendorf, the administrator, Mr. Weber ordered that I get one egg a day. We had about 3,000 chickens and every day we had to take the chicken eggs to Fuerstenwalde, the next town. All we got was one egg a week. So, it was really something special that I had everyday one egg to feel strong again.

I took over the pigs. We had about forty pigs, ten mother sows and the rest little ones. I would feed them and clean the stables. When the sows had the little ones I would cut the teeth from the little newborn pigs. So, I had done about everything, the horses, the cows, the pigs; now I was a perfect farmer.

There was a Polish inspector employed by the Jewish Federation and the way he degraded us was, "All you people know how to do is eat, drink, shit and have a good time. You guys don't know how to work with your hands." When I heard that I really got mad. I thought, I'm going to show

that guy that I can work with my hands too. That was that.

The first few months I did group work, like hay stacking, working on a threshing machine, and harvesting the potatoes and sugar beets. But later on, the inspector found out I could do a little more work than the others and I was promoted. He gave me a team of horses. I had to plow and do the fields. When you had horses you had to get up in the morning about four o'clock. Clean and brush your horses, feed the horses, and give them water. Everything had to be ready by seven o'clock. Of course you had breakfast first but by seven o'clock everyone had to start work. Even though I had special duties I enjoyed it.

In the beginning of the year 1942 we heard some rumors that people were "evacuated" from different cities and sent to the "East." We didn't know exactly what it meant but we were told there were some shortages of work hands and we were to take over some farms. But, it was just a rumor. We didn't know what it was like to be evacuated. Later on in spring of 1942, my parents let me know that they got an "order to be evacuated to go east." I went right away to the administrator and asked him if I could go back to Berlin to accompany my parents wherever they were to be evacuated. I was told by a German authority, "You work now for the German government. We need farmers, we have to send our men to the different German fronts, to France, and all over. You stay where you are." So, I had to let my parents and younger sister go. I never saw my parents or sister again.

Then, Hitler proclaimed the Draft Law. Everybody of the age eighteen and over, from time to time had to go for an interview in the next city, which was Fuerstenwalde. One day I got a notice from the draft board and I had to go with about half a dozen of my buddies to Fuerstenwalde. It was the closest city to the farm and we had an order to be there at 8 o'clock in the morning. We took the early train and went to the military building. At 8 o'clock nobody came, 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock nobody showed up. We waited until lunchtime, nobody came and finally later on at 4 o'clock came a sergeant, he looked over our papers and said, "Hey you guys are Jews. Hitler doesn't want any Jews fighting for Germany." He gave everybody an "F" which meant we were no good to fight. I was so discouraged that I couldn't be a soldier. Of course, I never knew what was going to happen to me later on, but at that time we felt that we were good for nothing.

We worked pretty hard on our reduced food rations. In winter time about ten hours and in the summer time about eleven to twelve hours. We had Wednesday afternoons off for agricultural meetings and lectures. We had Sundays off. The religious group *Aguda* didn't work on Saturdays, so they took our work over on Sunday. On our time off we did all kinds

of things to keep us going. A middle-aged couple came. His name was Willie Weisblatt; he was a Maccabi boxing champion from Silesia. When he came to our farm and saw us playing soccer he said, "I better show you how to march and follow orders from left to right. You never know, it could be good for you." So now instead of fooling around and playing soccer or ping-pong or doing nothing important, now on our day off we went to the open field and we started marching, left and right. Boy, did it do us good later on when we arrived in Auschwitz. He had a very good idea what was going to happen.

In Neuendorf, there were many young men and women. For years we saw each other everyday. So, little by little many friendships were made and some even got married on the farm. I went out with different girls and some were nice, some not, anyhow, I was kind of selective. Paula, she went out too. Little by little we came together, Paula and myself. And we talked about what we could do in the future if everything went all right. Then we found out we had many things in common. I think we were meant for each other.

I wrote a letter to Paula's mother and asked for her consent to our marriage. Her father had died many years before. We were kind of young. I was twenty one and Paula was twenty two, but we told her mother we never knew what was going to happen. It would be easier to fight together and we really wanted to build a future together. I asked a friend of mine, who worked many times outside of the farm to get me two rings, which he did. Then I think it was May, I slipped a ring on Paula's finger. Once in a while there was some good news on the farm.

We weren't allowed to have a radio anymore. We found out here and there that the war was in high gear. That the English/American Air Force bombed the heck out of the big cities: Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen. We said, "Well good for every bomb that does some damage because we know something is going to happen to us anyhow". Not too far from the town of Neuendorf was a small airport. Once in a while the English/American Air Force would come and try to bomb the airport. At the farm the cows and the horses would get mad and run so we had to run into the different stables. One man per cow and one man per horse. We had to keep the cows and the horses together or they would strangle themselves. As soon as the alarm went off everybody rushed out. On night duty I had to herd the cows and horses, otherwise something would happen to them.

We worked hard on our reduced food rations. When we had time, we picked nettles and dandelions. Paula cooked them to just keep us going because we were always hungry. There was no more good food anymore.

After a while Paula's mother and older sister were deported, so I never

had a chance to meet my future mother-in-law. Paula had a brother in Australia. He left Germany in 1938. When we talked about our future we talked about going to Palestine or Australia.

On the 29th of July, 1942, we went with horse and buggy to Buchholz, the next village, and we got our marriage certificate. With us was Mr. Martin Gerson who was the leader for the Jewish Affairs in Neuendorf. He was our witness. I remember on the way home we stopped the horse at an open field and he picked some flowers for us as a gift for our wedding. When we arrived back at the farm, he got us forty pounds of sour cherries. That evening after work we invited our closest friends; it was our celebration, Sour cherries, no cake, just forty pounds of sour cherries.

A few days later on Sunday the 2nd of August, we got permission to go to Berlin for our Jewish ceremony. We took the train. Paula still had an aunt, Greta Schaul who had a married daughter, Ruth Greenbaum in Berlin. Greta was Paula's mother's sister who married Paula's father's brother. Somehow her aunt got us a little synagogue in a Jewish orphanage for our ceremony. Most of the big synagogues were damaged or burnt down. That was the only one really available to us. Our rabbi, Rabbi Lowenstein, performed the ceremony and after that we had a bite to eat. There were only six people at our wedding including the rabbi. In the afternoon we said goodbye to each other and we took the train back to Neuendorf. The next morning Paula had to get up at four a.m. again and I had to get up early to do my work. That was our honeymoon. Only a few weeks later we tried to get in touch with the Aunt, but she had been deported.

Little by little we heard of more deportations, but since we were told we had to work for the government, we still felt pretty safe.

Deportation Auschwitz

In March of 1943 the Gestapo came to our farm and brought a whole bunch of Ukrainian workers and we were to show them what to do and we were to evacuate to the East to take over some other farms. Here came a bunch of Ukrainian farmers. They couldn't speak German and we couldn't speak Russian, so we had to show them everything. We were to show them how to milk the cows, how to care for the horses and feed the chickens. It took us some weeks to break them in. In the beginning of April 1943, the Gestapo came and told us that they were giving us three days to pack our things up. Two suitcases and one backpack each.

They said: "We will take you to Berlin for a bigger transport." So, here we were starting to pack our things and our little belongings and then

about the 15th of April 1943, the Gestapo came. Before we got on the train we were to sign some papers. We were brought to Berlin. We were forced to sign papers that said: Because of hostility towards the state, I had to leave the German territory and no longer had claim to any property there. Even the fathers who had little babies had to sign for these papers for their little sons. In Berlin, we were housed in an old Jewish nursing home where the people had been deported. We stayed there for a few days.

While we were waiting to be transported two men showed up and watched us pack. These two told us that we were going to be deported to Auschwitz. They had escaped, but they were brought back to Berlin.

They told us, "Forget about your packing, as soon as you get to Auschwitz, they take everything you have." Of course, we didn't believe them. To us Auschwitz was Auschwitz; we didn't know what it meant. These two guys didn't have anything and they were just telling us some stories. Of course we found out that they were right.

Judenfrei

The 20th of April was Hitler's birthday. One of the big shots, Reich Propaganda Minister, Josef Goebbels, sent a telegram to Hitler. "In honor of your birthday Berlin will be *Judenfrei* (free of Jews)." So, they got us in the early morning on the 19th and took us to a lonely train station. They didn't want anyone to know what was going on.

The cattle cars were waiting for us. They were SS armed and pushed about seventy to eighty Jewish men, women and children in each car. There was some straw on the floor and one pail to relieve yourself. When they counted about seventy-five to eighty they closed the door. We were loaded and going into the unknown. We stayed in the cattle car, one day to a day and a half. Once in a while the train stopped, we looked out a little window, but there was nothing there. After a day and a half we finally stopped for good, the door was opened. There were farms, no city, nothing. We were surrounded by barbed wire. Soon enough the guards came with the dogs.

"Get out of the cattle cars as soon as possible."

Some older people said we want to grab our suitcases and they were told "Ah, forget about those you can pick those up later." They took us to a wide-open field. Later we found out it was Auschwitz-Birkenau. In front of a little podium was a man, we didn't know who he was. We found out later that he was the infamous Dr. Josef Mengele. He had a sort of conductor's baton and he began to sort out who should live and who should die. He shouted, "I want old men on one side, I want old women on one side, I want women without children, I want women with children, I want on this side young men and the

other side young women."

Before we knew it, Paula and I were torn apart and we had to go to different groups. While we were sorted Paula went to help a woman, with two children. One was in her arms and the other was two or three years old tugging on her skirt. I felt that something wasn't one hundred percent. I had a funny feeling that they would do something with the children.

I shouted, "Paula, leave that child alone. Give the child back to the woman." After the war Paula told me many times "You never screamed at me like that, I wondered why you screamed at me. You really saved my life." Women with children never saw the camp. They were gassed right away.

So, all the older people were told, "You must be tired from the trip. Maybe you want to take a shower, refresh yourself and change clothing. Why don't you walk, it's just a block or two over there."

There were some older people complaining. We were standing most of the time in the cattle car and couldn't lie down; it is kind of hard for us to walk.

"Oh don't worry about it."

So, they brought some trucks over and took the old people to the so-called showers. Shortly after we arrived we learned from fellow inmates that people going to the showers were asked to take off their clothes in front of those young S.S. guards. In front of the so-called showers, there were inmates in stripped outfits, they gave everybody a bar of soap just to fool the people at the last minute.

Zyklon-B

When the first people entered the first showers, they said, "That doesn't look like showers to me, let's get out of here."

By that time it was too late; the Nazis came with their dogs and pushed the people back. When they had about 500 people, they would close the doors. The people would be waiting to take a shower and instead of water, the very powerful Zyklon-B was released, a very fine powder which dissolves in minutes from the body-heat of the people. Within ten to fifteen minutes the whole group of people was gassed and dead.

While they were dying, *kommandos* arrived that worked eight to ten hour shifts twenty four hours around the clock. They would sort through the clothes taking wallets, rings, watches and whatever they could find of value. Another commando came and opened the corpses' mouths and when they saw gold or silver teeth they knocked their teeth out and put them in little bags. Everything was shipped back to cities in Germany and sold in the second hand market. The money collected was used to support the war.

Only people who looked good enough to the Nazis were let into the camp. Older people, women with children, or even younger people who didn't look good enough never saw the camp. They were gassed right away. I lost track of Paula, she was pushed to another side and we had to go through a line of Nazis. Everybody was looked over and if you didn't look 100 percent good enough you were pulled out and never saw the camp. We arrived at the camp, the 20th of April 1943. It was the second night of Passover.

According to the Torah, Passover is supposed to be a happy festival, a happy holiday. We celebrate the exodus of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt into freedom. In our cases, we marched from freedom into slavery into bondage. We didn't know at the time, while we were in a cattle car on the way to Auschwitz on the first night of Passover, the Jewish people in the Warsaw Ghetto began the struggle against the Nazis, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It took the Nazis about twenty seven days to win the fight against a hand full of Jews, men, women, and children who fought until the last to defend themselves.

Colored triangles

The Nazis took us men to Auschwitz III, also known as Buna Monowitz, the name of the factory located there. It was only a few miles away from Auschwitz I, the main camp and Auschwitz II or Birkenau. When we arrived we were separated from our suitcases; if we had some, we were welcomed by Nazi guards telling us, "I'll give you one minute to dispose of all your belongings. Your suitcases to one side, your watches, your wallets, everything you own. I'll give you one minute or you'll get it." Everybody struggled to follow orders, to get rid of everything we had with us. Here came a *commando* (a group of a few people). We had to strip naked and they shaved us all over the body, head, body, everything. We looked like a bunch of idiots.

I received a tattoo on the left front arm. My number was 117033. Forget my name, I didn't have a name anymore. I was just a number and when it came to roll call later on, I was called by my number to do my dirty work.

Now, in Auschwitz III we were about 25-30,000 people working there. How can they identify each prisoner? There were some gypsies, communists, criminals, Jehovah Witnesses, homosexuals, so the Nazis were very clever. After we received our number on the left forearm, everybody got a little triangle with a number on their uniform to identify the persons. For instance, the communists received a red triangle, the

Gypsies, a black triangle, homosexuals, a pink triangle, Jehovah Witnesses a purple triangle, criminals a green triangle, and the Jews received a triangle from the yellow star we had to wear in the cities before we went to the camps. We were identified as a certain group of prisoners who were supposed to be worked to death.

After we were shaved, we were told to take a shower. Several of us were very hesitant, but we had to take a shower, and then run naked to the barracks to receive our uniform with our canvas shoes with the heavy, wooden soles. This was after they had taken our good leather shoes away. Everything was taken away from us. After this we had to march first in front of the big place. After twenty to thirty minutes we came back to the barracks where the man in charge, a criminal with a green triangle, told us, "Boy you must be really good. Sometimes they take hours and hours before the Nazis let you go. You must make a good impression. You guys sure know how to march."

That reminded me of Willie Weisblatt, the Maccabi boxer, who came years ago to Neuendorf, who told us one of these days it might be good to learn how to march, you never know when it might be useful. Boy, was he right.

The first time we got food for the day we didn't have enough metal bowls, so two guys had to take the food in the same bowl. Later on everybody got their own metal bowl, which you had to take care of all day long. So we tied strings through a hole in the bowl and hung it around us so we would be sure not to lose it. As soon as we got our food, a piece of dry bread and some watery soup, a bunch of Yeshiva *bochers* from the *Aguda Yisrael* came to ask us what we were going to do, because we are not supposed to eat any bread during Passover."

So, what can we do, we weren't rabbis. We were the old ones, I was about twenty two, the younger ones, teenagers, were sixteen or seventeen. What can we tell those guys?

Well, I told them: "look here, we were never in a situation like this in Jewish history. God is going to forgive you if you eat your piece of bread and do the best you can." But some guys didn't listen to us, they exchanged the piece of bread, bread was like gold in the camp, they exchanged it for the lousy, watery soup everyday during the Passover holidays and some of those young kids, 16, 17, maybe 18 died within a few weeks.

The terrible stench in Birkenau

We were lucky enough to survive the selection process in Auschwitz. After a few days we heard about the chimneys going all day and night and the terrible stench in Birkenau. We heard the prisoners working in the crematorium could not keep up with burning the dead bodies, so they had stacked those bodies against the wall of the crematorium, and sure enough especially in summer time, the bodies began to stink like heck, but after a few days of course, you just don't notice it anymore. And we were only a few miles away from all this. That sure gave me a shudder.

Here I was in Auschwitz III, Buna-Monowitz. That camp was established at the end of '41-'42. We had to work for the IG Farben Industries, which was a company that was trying to make synthetic rubber and second-hand gasoline, which worked pretty good in German tanks.

Originally those inmates had to march from the main camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau , about three to four miles every day to the IG Farben factory, but with the lousy food, the malnutrition and everything else, when the people arrived to start working they were too weak to do a 100 percent job. Many times the management complained to the SS. Everyday came more complaints so the leaders of IG Farben volunteered to build a camp right next to the company. That was about 1941-42. Heinrich Himmler, the man in charge of the concentration camps, came and okayed it. Now instead of marching four to five miles from the main camp, we walked fifteen to twenty minutes to work.

A day in the camp

A day in the camp started at about 5:30 a.m. They give you a piece of dried bread, once a week a spoonful of jam, and some burnt corn water they called coffee. Then you go for roll call and you were sent away to different shifts of work. I remember I had such a swollen arm from the tattoo because I was one of the last ones to get my number, and by then the needle was already dull. When I went to work I saw a bunch of sweaters lying around and nobody was around. I thought it would be a good chance to grab a sweater. Because we were pretty cold, we were in just a shirt, a cotton jacket and that was all we had. So I put the sweater on, and at night time I showed the sweater to my fellow inmates, my friends and I was told, "boy are you smart, you know how to organize and grab some stuff from Auschwitz, boy are you smart."

I was pretty happy about it. But the next day I had some itching and scratching all over my body and I found out those sweaters were put down

for disinfection and they found some lice on me The guy in charge brought me to the *Lagerarzt* (camp doctor), and they reported me, and I had to go to the headquarters where I got beaten up just for having the lice. I was told, "you dirty *son-of-a-bitch*, you want to get the whole camp infested." They gave me a cold shower and I got sprayed all over, beaten and went back to work. That was my first experience with the lice. It was terrible.

In wintertime we had to work about nine to ten hours and in summer, ten to twelve hours. We worked for six hours, then they give you the lousy watery soup, then you worked another six hours. Then you went to roll call and if somebody was missing or hiding, or committed suicide, they had to drag the dead body through roll call and after that was done sometimes took an hour or an hour and a half, never mind the rain or snow in winter, or heat in summertime. The same number who left the camp in the morning had to return in the evening. So, by the time we got into the barracks we were half dead, sick or weak, we got our lousy soup and we were happy to make it another day. That went on everyday.

My first job was to work in the so-called cable *kommando*. We had to dig trenches about fifty feet long, five to six feet deep, then take the big cable and put them in the ground, cover them up with some rocks and fill up the trenches. Every time it was hurry up, hurry up, we have no time for that. Now for the first fifty feet of trenches we had done we would see another fifty feet to dig. That was a very tough job. Like I said, it was for our food, so you better keep up or else. I worked the cable *kommando* for about six to seven months.

A friend of mine, Walter Meyersohn from the farm in Neuendorf, learned the trade to become a blacksmith and worked already in the mechanic *kommando*. Number 80 got me into that *kommando*… and then one day came a call, who can work with tools, and I raised my hand. I was transferred to the so-called mechanic *kommando*, which was much easier on you. We had to put beams together, sometime climb forty to fifty feet up and put the bolts and nuts together. And if you were to fall down, who cared? After all life didn't mean anything anymore; we were just a bunch of bodies. But, the mechanic *kommando* wasn't as physical as the cable *kommando* where I was digging trenches.

Later on I was told, people who worked in the cable *kommando*, they called it death *kommando*, they try you out for three to four months, if you were able to survive they gave you another job, if you were too weak and couldn't get up in the morning or couldn't report to work, they would shoot you or take you to the gas chambers. So, I was really glad I survived the first three months of that kommando.

We had with our transport a man, Paul Hendrickson. He was about

six feet-five inches, about 200 or 240 lbs. He was strong like a bull. In Neuendorf on the farm he took a 100-lb. bag of corn and would throw it in the air just for exercise. I always tell the students, when I go to the schools, if the Huskies or the Seahawks football teams had a man like this, they would win more games because this guy could just pick you up and throw you to the side. But, when he came to Auschwitz and the Nazis saw how big and strong he was, he got the toughest job, carrying cement bags or heavy beams all day long. Paul was the biggest and strongest of the whole transport. After three or four weeks he just collapsed and died. That man was big and strong and he couldn't live on a lousy piece of bread or a little bit of watery soup. Like I said, Paul was the biggest and strongest one and he died within three or four weeks. Poor Paul.

Yom Kippur, 1943

When the first Yom Kippur arrived in 1943, the leader of the *Aguda Yisrael*, Josef Schwartz, came to me.

"Klaus, we have to have ten people to do Yom Kippur services. We need one or two men to fast."

I said, "Josef, you are crazy, what do you mean to fast? We don't get enough food all day long anyhow. We are half starved. How come you want to fast? It's ridiculous."

"We made up our mind. We need you, please help us out." So, he went with us to the man in charge of the barrack. Here we are ten Jewish people and tomorrow is the highest Jewish holiday of the year and it's a fast day. We made up our mind and we want to fast twenty four hours. Please put the food away for us.

The guy in charge said, "I never heard of that in my life. You people are crazy. We don't get enough food anyhow. Why do you want to fast? Ok, I tell you what. I'll put the food away for you. But, if I see any of you eating or drinking during the twenty four hours I am going to report you to the SS. No one is going to fool around with me, you understand."

"OK." So, here we were, it was September. Yom Kippur was late that year, in early October. We didn't eat or drink anything. We had to work hard all day long, for it was still warm. In the evening we went home from work, we went to roll call and we finally got back in the barracks to receive some food.

When the guy saw us, he told Josef, "I saved the food for you. Come on receive your food."

Josef said, "Please give us another few minutes. We want to pray before we eat."

"What is the matter with you guys?" Josef knew a few of the prayers without the *Siddur*. We didn't have the *Siddur* or *Machzor*. We knew a few prayers, *Sh'ma, Kaddish, Avinu Malkenu*. After we were done the man came and said, "Come on, go and eat." As bad as the guy was (he had a green triangle which means he was a criminal), when he saw that we had fasted for 24 hours without any food and come back and pray, that man gave us not only the food we had coming, but gave everybody extra bread and soup. The men were so amazed that here is a bunch of people in all the trouble and all the circumstances, we still observed the highest holiday of the year.

Looking back, the farm in Neuendorf, which was called *Hachsharah* (the training farm), played a big role in my life. There I met Paula, fell in love and got married. The hard work I had done in Neuendorf kept me going in Buna. If the Nazis would have taken me from my job as a window trimmer, which is not a very physical job, I never would have made it in Auschwitz. Paula was also lucky. I didn't know where she was or if she was alive. She told her story in a book, *The Auschwitz Munitions Factory: Through the Eyes Of Its Former Slave Laborers, published by University Press of America, Inc.*

One time I remember I was assigned with four or five other inmates to do the wash, the laundry to wash the underwear and shirts for the SS guards. On the way to the laundry came another SS guard, who stopped us and asked us where we were going. After we told him we were supposed to wash the underwear, he said "I got a more important job to do, come on, follow me."

After roll call at night, it was reported that we didn't show up at the laundry rooms, and the SS guard asked us why. After I told him what happened, he said "you understand perfect German! I'll let you have it!"

He took me to the *Lageralteste (*camp eldest*)*, who was about six feet and five inches tall. He was a fellow inmate in charge of all the prisoners. The SS guard told him we didn't follow the orders, and told him "let him have it." I had to pull my pants down and two inmates held me down over the table, and with a whip he started beating me: one, two, three, four, five. After about five lashes, I screamed like a little boy, he stopped and said to me, "Next time you follow orders, ok?" What could I say? I couldn't sleep for many nights on my back.

So we got up in the morning. We *schlepped* to work, roll call, and got our lousy food. At nighttime after the last roll call was over we thank God, another day we made it. I lost little by little more weight. I was still able to do my job and I didn't have to worry too much.

Selections

The worst thing, everybody was afraid of was the so-called *aussortung* – the selections. Every four to six weeks came the head doctor from the main camp, with three to four guys, and after you work ten to twelve hours a day, after roll call, when you got back to your barracks, you were to strip naked and in came the head doctor. We had to march left and right, backwards, forwards, as fast as we can. If you couldn't follow orders or if you couldn't turn around fast enough, or left and right, if you were too weak and skinny to do another day's work, you had to show your number on your forearm and you were marked ready to go to the ovens. You were told after roll call in the morning, as everybody marched out to stay there; and you would find out what they were going to do with you.

There were many fellow-inmates who didn't understand German very well and they came to us, "what does it mean to be written up?"

"Well, if you can't work 100 percent, the way the Nazis want you to work, they put you in the sky *kommando*, it was sort of a bitter, sweet job.

"What do you mean sky commando?"

"When you can't work anymore, they write you up, put you in the gas chambers, they burn your body in the crematoria and you go up the chimney into the sky. That is the so-called sky-*kommando*."

The IG Farben company, the place we worked for, paid the Nazis three marks or three-and-a-half marks a day, about seventy five cents, for room and board, nothing for our work.

Sometimes we had to work with Canadian prisoners of war. We had a man in our crew by the name of Norbert Wollheim. He spoke very good English and when nobody was around, he snuck over and asked the Canadian guys, "What is going on in the world?" First we found out that somebody tried to assassinate Hitler in Prussia. When we heard that we were like oh my goodness, we will be freed. Of course it didn't happen. On another occasion when he asked the guys, we found out about the landing on Normandy in June 1944. Again we thought that will take three to four weeks and we will all be free. Of course it took almost a year before we were liberated.

I found out that Norbert – we became good friends – was the leader of the *Kindertransport* that transported the children in 1938-39 from Berlin to England. All those things we found out later, when I went with him to Germany for a big trial against a Nazi *kommandant* in 1959. I found out that between 1941-1945 in Auschwitz III , where I did my slave labor, about 25,000- 30,000 men died from malnutrition, starving to death or beatings, or committed suicide. Whenever a person collapsed and died, the

next day he was replaced from the main camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, which was only a few miles from our camp.

Christmas, 1943-44

Christmas, 1943-44 we didn't have to go to work. It was a bitter cold day and we were called to roll call to assemble for a meeting. What happened was three fellow inmates tried to escape, and they were brought back from Auschwitz, to our camp. Here came the *Kommandan*t from the main camp, he erected three gallows. The *Kommandant* told everyone: "There is no way for you guys to escape. We get you anyhow. The only way for you guys to escape from here is through the chimney." Which we well understood. After this we were so down, what's the use to try to escape, they will get you anyway. So, after this we were very much discouraged. After that no one else tried to escape.

Finally it was spring 1944, thank goodness the cold winter was over. We worked as good as we could, but many times you would miss your fellow inmate from the day before. Anytime somebody couldn't make it anymore, they were picked up and put away.

Walking skeletons

Another experience in summer 1944. From all the lousy nutrition we received I developed carbuncle, a kind of tumor on my neck. Every move I made hurt and became bigger and bigger. I reported to the clinic and there was a fellow inmate, a known Czech doctor:

"Klaus, I can help you. I can cut it out for you, but after three days you have to recover or I have to report you to the SS."

So, he took me and put me on a table on my belly. There were about two to three inmates holding me down and with a big knife without any anesthesia he cut into my neck criss-cross, lifted out the carbuncle which was literally probably like a little fist, got it out, and put a paper bandage on my neck.

"I will keep you here for three days and redo your bandage every so often but after three days you better go back to work or I will have to report you. I'm sorry, we have only so many beds." So, when I got that cut I screamed like a bull but bit my teeth and I suffered through it and in three days I knew I had to go back to work or else. So I recovered as good as I could in three days and the fourth day I went back to work and little by little, I got better.

The Nazis would call up the main camp and say, "we need another 25

new people to replace the old ones who perished." I did the best I could, worked as good as I could, but of course I lost weight like anybody else and many men were called *Mueselmann*, walking skeletons.

The worst thing was selection. In fall of 1944 we had another selection; I couldn't march fast enough and turn around left or right. My number was written off. I knew exactly what that meant. My friends came from all over.

"Klaus," they said, "too bad you can't hold out another few weeks or months. The war will be over soon."

I said, "Don't give me any sad songs. I did my best, worked as hard as I could. I just can't do it anymore. That's it."

But, a funny thing happened to many of us. When we woke up in the morning some of my fellow inmates had water in their forearms, some had water in their legs, some in the belly. I woke up every morning with a bloated face for about two to three hours and then I looked again like a walking skeleton. Next morning everybody had to report for roll call. My number was called out. I was told to stay there and let everybody march out. After everybody was gone we were told to go to a certain place where about 100-125 inmates waited to be put away. I joined them but I was one of the taller ones.

While we were waiting to be taken to the gas chambers, an SS guard looked us over and, like I said, I was one of the taller ones, and he spotted me and said, " Hey you, with your big fat face! Don't you know what it means to be in that group?"

I said, "No sir, I don't." I played dumb.

"You look good enough to me. You can work another three or four days. If you don't go back to work, I will report your number and you will get your punishment (get beaten up)."

With all the strength I had I ran back to the barrack and the guy in charge of the barrack saw me, he said, "My goodness, what in heck are you doing here? You should be on your way to the gas chambers. He looked me over and he said, "You know you fooled that Nazi guard. He thought because you had a big, swollen face you were good all over the body. Man you are lucky. You better go hide somewhere because the Nazis come every hour to check the barracks."

In the evening, my fellow inmates said, "Klaus you are still alive. Oh my goodness, you are lucky." The next morning, waking up with a bloated face and after two or three hours, I looked like anybody else.

The following weeks I got weaker and weaker. I said to myself, if there was another selection later on, bloated face or not, I could hardly work anymore. I don't think I can make it anymore. It was only winter 1944.

By the beginning of January 1945, the Nazis got kind of frantic. We heard some sound, artillery or cannons coming closer and closer. We were told that it was the Russian army. The Nazis didn't know what to do with us. How could they gas hundred thousands of people, not only from our camp but other camps too? We found out later that they had already closed the gas chamber by the fall of 1944.

A forced march

On the 18th of January, 1945 the sirens went through the camp, the loud speakers called everybody for roll call. Everybody was handed out a double ration of dry bread and told you are going to march to the next camp, which was like from Seattle to Olympia, Longview, or Ellensburg. It was a bitter, cold day. Here we were in our thin uniforms, walking in our canvas shoes with the wooden sole. It was snowing like mad.

We walked five in a row. If somebody would fall down and couldn't get up anymore the Nazis came, the guards came, and said:

"Hand that guy out. We are not going to stop the march for one lousy dog." So I saw with my own eyes, the SS came and put a gun in the fellow inmate's neck and killed him.

Another S.S. guard was told, "Go to the mayor of the town and tell them to remove all the dead bodies because the Russian Army is after us." Then some of the SS guards took off, and all of a sudden we didn't have enough guards to march along with us, so the guards grabbed some homecoming German soldiers and ordered them to be our watchdogs.

I remember on our side there was a small soldier who was on his way home to his family, but was forced to march with us. He left his rifle to one of our marching bodies to carry for him, because he was tired. We marched all-night and part of the day, and only rested once in a chicken coop. We finally arrived in the camp which was Gleiwitz.

The *Kommandant* saw us coming and told us, "We have no room for you or food so I will make arrangements for you to get going." And he ordered some old open railroad cars for us. Even when Hitler realized that the war was lost, they still made sure they had cattle cars to transport us poor creatures from one place to another, up to the last minute.

Back to Gleiwitz

They didn't have enough room for us, no beds for us, so we stayed there over night and slept as good as we could on the floor. The next morning we were marched to the railroad station where the *Kommandant* had ordered

some railroad cars for us. We were loaded into the cars (about 60 to a car) with a little piece of bread and we were told, "you guys are going from here to Austria. There is a big concentration camp called Mauthausen. And they have so much room, I'm sure they will accept you." So here we were, it was snowing and cold like always, winters in Poland are cold there. We went on our trip after standing in the railroad cars mostly over night and half the next day. We stopped to let other trains go by, we finally arrived at Mauthausen. Again we were told the camp was full with many prisoners from other camps. So they shipped us back again. We were in the car for days and days without any food. It was snowing like mad. We ate the snow and knocked off the icicles from the cattle car. Once in a while the Nazis threw one loaf of bread into the cattle car and we fought like animals for a crumb of bread. The Nazis had a good time and would laugh and say, "Look how those guys fight for a piece of bread."

The Nazis shipped us back and forth between the camps for days and days without food. Now you might say I am exaggerating, but when you go back to the 1990-91 Gulf War, there was a Captain Scott O'Grady, from the United States Air Force, this man didn't have any food for seven days. All he had was bugs and leaves and little water, so you can live for a long time without food but you have to have some liquid.

It was snow that kept us going. To begin with about 60 of us were in each cattle car and over the days, some people starved to death or froze to death. When somebody died the SS shouted, "Get those dead bodies out of the cattle car, hurry up, we don't want any dead people among you." But before we threw the dead bodies out of the cattle car we undressed the people and put on their jacket or two pairs of pants or took a pair of pants and tore it up to make rags for our shoes because we didn't have any socks. We started out with 60 and went down to 30-40 and then we arrived in the first camp. It was Berlin-Sachsenhausen Camp.

When we threw the bodies out, the man in charge, Oberscharfuehrer (Sergeant Major) Bernhard Rackers added, "All those prisoners, the *mueselmann* too. Then we can get rid of them all together at the same time." Then we heard some shooting all around us, and I looked over the border of the rail car, and saw Bernhard Rackers with a pistol in his hand running around and killing those half-dead, weak prisoners. I used this scene in my testimony at the trial of Bernhard Rackers in the fall of 1959, when I was asked by the German government to come to testify in the case against Bernhard Rackers.

In Gleiwitz, we were all split up. All my buddies except for one called Josef were sent to Buchenwald. He was much older than we were, and held out pretty good. But after a few days in the old railroad cars in the

bitter cold, he went crazy and tried to climb out of the railroad car, which meant certain death. Along with another inmate in my car, with all the strength we had left, we held him down, and later on he survived. After the liberation he moved to New York. He married a widow with two daughters. Every time they would write to me "I will always remember, Klaus thanks to you I survived" and how happy he was. And after many years, after he passed away, his widow was still thanking me for the many happy years they were able to spend together.

Sachsenhausen near Berlin was one of the biggest camps, besides Dachau, Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen. Before 1938, before Kristallnacht, many of the Berlin people were taken to Sachsenhausen. Sachsenhausen took us for two or three days and then again we were marched to another camp, Flossenburg. This marching from camp to camp became really a death march. We lost so many people marching to Gleiwitz and of course on the railroad for days and now from Sachsenhausen to Flossenburg many people we never saw again.

After Gleiwitz they put part of our marchers in the directions of Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen. So we were in another smaller group to Flossenberg. By that time it was the end of March 1945 or the beginning of April. Flossenberg camp had a stone quarry and the poor inmates had to work real hard on the lousy food they got. We were told it was no use to break us in because we didn't know how long we were going to stay there. After they gave us our so-called breakfast, dry bread and hot water with burnt corn, called coffee, they let us stay outside in front of the barracks all day long in the bitter cold.

The guy in charge of the barracks was a really mean guy. He didn't like us from the beginning on. Especially there was a Hungarian young man -- he took the poor guy to take a cold shower and stand naked in front of the barracks, gave him another cold shower and chased him in front of the barracks. After a few times, the poor young guy collapsed and died. The guy took the jacket off with the number and took it to the front office and said, "Hey I got rid of another Jew." The *Lageralteste* (camp eldest) in charge of the blocks of inmates were really sometimes meaner than the SS.

Another new camp

After a week or so, again, they marched us from Flossenburg to a newer established camp, Leonberg. This camp was an underground factory where workers made parts for planes.

Again they told us, "It's no use to break you in. You will be moved again in a few days." But, I happened to meet a guy, he was from Berlin

and we talked a little bit.

"You are from Berlin aren't you? I have a good job for you, double ration bread." Oh my goodness, what can I do? Wait until the next morning. So the next morning came around and before roll call I had to go with him from one barrack to another and collect the dead bodies who starved to death over night or committed suicide, put the dead bodies on a pile, took the jacket with the numbers off and brought them to the front office to show who died overnight, and for this I got double ration bread.

Now this food he gave me was just a few minutes before roll call and nobody could eat any bread during roll call. With my dirty hands I just picked up 30-40 dead bodies, I got my extra bread and I hurried up and rushed and ate my bread because, like I said, no one was allowed to eat. If someone told me today here is a dead dog, pick up the dog and here is a piece of cake I would say are you kidding, I want to wash my hands first. But, over there you were just a machine and you did what you were told or got punished.

Muehldorf

The Nazis didn't know what to do with us. From the East came the Russian army, from the Northwest came the English army and from the southwest came the Americans. So here they took us again, marching again, to another camp by the name of Muehldorf.

Muehldorf was a satellite camp of Dachau. Dachau was overloaded so they ordered us to that camp. By the gate in the front there were two tables with two guys sitting there and everybody was checked out both by your number and the way you walked. If you walked pretty good then you went to the right side and if you didn't walk so good you went to the left side. Somehow I had a funny feeling we better hold back a little bit, there is something going on.

A friend of mine said, "Why don't we let some other marchers pass us and later on we would have to march anyhow." As it got darker and darker, the two guys sitting at the table had enough of it and said, "ah, the heck with it for today. Anybody who isn't checked out just walk in." Later on we found out the other inmates who went to the left side, who couldn't march anymore, who were too exhausted to do anything anymore, were put into in a cattle car with some carbon monoxide, so they got rid of those people.

The town of Muehldorf wasn't really big, but was an important railroad point. Either trains changed to Munich or to Nuremburg. Every night the American or English Air Force bombed the railroad station. The

next morning we had to march with the SS guards with dogs, and set the tracks straight again or clean up the building ruins. Everyday there was something else again. Our job was to clean up the mess from the air raids the night before. Of course the citizens of Muehldorf saw us everyday walking with the SS and the German Sheppard dogs everyday to work. They saw us doing our slave labor work. Later on they said, "Oh, we never knew there was a camp nearby."

Weaker and weaker

Towards the end of April I felt weaker and weaker. First I found out I had jaundice. I hesitated to go to the clinic because in Auschwitz if you went to the clinic they wouldn't let you stay more than three days. I thought that I wouldn't come out of the clinic again. So, I forced myself out to work every morning and come back every night. I got my lousy soup at lunchtime. At the end of April I just couldn't march out anymore. I saw a foxhole on the way to work, so the last few days of April I threw myself in one of the foxholes, hid all day long then joined my fellow marchers back to the camp. I didn't get my soup at lunchtime, but at least at night I could report for roll call. But I couldn't do that anymore either. The last few days in April, 1945, I had to report sick. I was sent to the clinic. I found out I had contracted typhus.

The clinic was overcrowded. They didn't have enough beds, so we put four men in one bed. Of course we were so skinny that we could fit four guys in one bed. We would lay there, no medication, all they could give us was water. We lay there just waiting to die.

Liberation

On the 2nd of May, the guy next to me said, "Hey, I hear some strange voices. There is something going on here."

I said, "You are delirious. I don't hear anything."

"Yes, there are some strange voices."

I listened more and more and, by God, he was right. I heard some shouting in English. The American Army came sooner than expected through the town. They came closer and closer to our camp. They surrounded the camp, some of the Nazi SS guards tried to get away, most of them on the motorbike. They caught the guys anyhow. When the GIs came into the clinic, I was lying there half dead.

Some of us were screaming, "Please don't shoot us. We are innocent. We didn't do anything wrong." The soldiers couldn't believe their eyes.

How educated, civilized people like the Germans were supposed to be, could do this to their fellow man. Some of the guys started crying like little kids; they couldn't understand it.

When they got over the shock they screamed: "You're free now. Don't worry. We are here to liberate you. Don't worry. You are free people now, forget about everything." They went from bed to bed and asked the patients, "What can we do for you? You want to eat something special, please let us know."

There were some who said, "You know I have not eaten meat for months and years."

"OK, we'll get you something. How about you?"

"I would like a nice special bean soup."

"Okay."

Another guy said, "I haven't seen chocolate for years."

"Chocolate. What do you want?"

"Nuts"

And, finally they came to my bed.

"What can we do for you guys?" I was burning up, I must have had a 103-104 degree temperature.

I said, "Please, bring me something to drink. Orange juice, apple juice, something, I need something to drink."

"Ok, don't worry."

Within a few minutes or so the soldiers came back and brought some people meat dinners, bean soup, some got chocolate, nuts, delicious drinks, whatever people ordered. And guess what, after a few days, people who had to ask for meat and other heavy dishes, some of those guys just passed away. If you don't have anything to eat for months and months, how can your system all of a sudden take those heavy fats and foods? Thank goodness I asked only for something to drink. Really, that saved me. Soon everything was organized and the American doctors took me and the other guys to a nearby Catholic hospital and those American doctors did anything, with the help of the nuns there, to get us back to health..

I arrived in Auschwitz in April 1943. My weight was about 165 lbs. The first time they put me on the scale in the hospital I was down to 96 lbs. I was just skin and bones like anybody else. So those doctors worked us over, I don't know what they did for us. My hearing wasn't so good. I was half deaf; that must have come from the typhus. It took me six to eight weeks to get back to recover.

A free person again

One day, when I was feeling much better, I asked my fellow inmates, "Why don't we go to town and see how it feels to be a free person again. Come on guys, let's get going." It was about a twenty minute walk to town. While we were looking around in our striped uniform, some of the citizens stopped and pointed their fingers at us and said, "Look at that. There are still some Jews running around. I thought Hitler killed all the Jews. Hitler didn't do such a good job."

I was the only one who understood German. There were some fellow inmates from Romania, Hungary, Poland, and they asked me what did they say?

I said, "You know, the German people didn't learn anything. They are still as bad as they were before. Now they are going to blame us for losing the war. If I were you I would go as fast as possible get out of Germany and go to Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands. Those are nice and friendly people."

I gave everyone a good idea of where to go, but I of course couldn't leave Germany. I promised my wife we would meet in her hometown. So, we walked back again and that was my first experience as a free person.

When I was a little bit stronger I got a piece of paper and a pencil and I wrote a little note.

"Paula, I'm still alive. Please wait for me. I'm here in a hospital in Bavaria."

Now I remembered the address of a family acquainted with Paula's parents. Little by little I went up to the nearby highway, saw some soldiers coming home, and asked one of the guys, "Where are you going?"

He said, "I'm going to Munich."

I said, "Why don't you give this little piece of paper to someone who is going north, to Leipzig." It went through so many hands and by golly my wife Paula eventually got the note. There were no post offices so it was only lucky that she got it later on.

Bernie

I met Bernie Wallheimer in Aurich when he was a ten-year-old boy, then we met again on the Jewish farm in Neuendorf. We were deported to Auschwitz together in April 1943. When we went on the death march Bernie was too sick to march so the Nazi guards left him behind and told him and others, "You guys are going to die anyways. There is no use to fool around with you."

But somehow Bernie made it…he told me a tragic story. After we left on the 18th of January some sick inmates walked into the chambers where the Nazi SS had some extra uniforms, so they got in and put on the extra uniforms to keep warm. When the first Russian Army arrived in Auschwitz, they saw some men running around in SS uniforms, and before they realized who they were, they shot a bunch of people. Inmates who survived the atrocities by the S.S. were shot by the Russian Liberators. How tragic. Bernie was lucky to be alive and he was liberated by the Russian army the 27th of January, 1945, nine days after we left Auschwitz on the death march. Bernie lived with his family in Israel, and passed away in 2006.

Now was my time to leave the hospital. From Muehldorf it was about, normal time, six or seven hours by train to Arnstadt, Paula's hometown. But of course there were no buses, no trains, no nothing. I took two friends with me and we began walking from one place to another. One friend was Juergen Bassfreund who later changed his name to Jack Bass. The other fellow went his own way after a while. We stayed the night in some refugee camps and got something to eat.

After a few days we arrived in Munich. In Munich we got some decent clothing, got rid of the striped uniforms and another friend of mine kept on walking with me. It took about three or three-and-a-half weeks to come to my wife's hometown. When we came to a river there was nobody to take us over to the other side because all the bridges were destroyed by the Nazis, so we had to wait for a boat. So, we kept on walking and walking.

Finding Paula

The first big town we came to was Fuerth, still in the Bavarian zone. This was where Henry Kissinger, the former Secretary of State, was born. My friend stayed in Fuerth, and I kept on walking by myself to get to Arnstadt which was in the Soviet Zone. On the border of the American and Soviet zones stood a house. One part in the American Zone, on the other side, the Russian Zone. There was an old woman living there. She was waiting for her son to come home from the war and she took me in one night. I had no trouble going into the Russian Zone because I went in the back of the house and here I was in the Russian Zone.

I kept on walking. Once in a while a farmer would take me with horse and buggy to the next little town. Little by little I made it. After about three or three-and-a-half weeks, I arrived in Arnstadt. I went to the family. I remembered the address. When I came of course nobody knew me, but the daughter of the family said, "Are you the husband of Paula?

"Yes"

"Oh my goodness! I have to run over and tell her."

Paula came running over and we rushed into each other's arms. It is hard to describe the moment we saw each other after 28 months. Until Paula got my note, she had no idea that I was alive and I had no idea that Paula was alive. Here we were together the first time after all our experiences-- together again.

After we calmed down a little bit, Mrs. Guttmann, the woman Paula knew, came over and told us how happy she was that we were reunited. Mrs. Guttmann wasn't Jewish, but her husband was. He was a communist and he was taken in 1937-38 to Buchenwald and he lost his life there. So, Mrs. Guttmann had an understanding what it was like to be in a concentration camp.

After the war we found out that of the ten couples on the farm, only one other couple and my wife and I both survived. Either the wife died or the husband died or both didn't make it. We were lucky. We were separated for twenty eight months and didn't know whether each one was still alive. What kept us going, in my case at least, were three things: 1) will-power; I was a young married man, only nine months married, and when I saw people my age dying left and right, I made up my mind, "I want to see my wife again, I want to come out." and hoped my wife would make it through too. 2) I was lucky I had a good friend that got me out of the death *kommando*, digging ditches all the time, and 3) I had a strong belief in God; if I wouldn't have hoped and prayed that I would live another day, from day to day I would not be here today to talk to classes or to write this story.

Paula's hometown took in very many refugees from the nearby bombed out cities. There was a shortage for housing, so the city council forced the citizens to take in some refugees if you had a big house or big apartment. So, Paula landed in an apartment of the widow of the editor and owner of the only paper in Arnstadt. He was a well-known anti-Semite, and of all the things she had to lease one room to us. Now you must understand the atmosphere. When I moved in, every time we went out of our room, to the kitchen or bathroom, she quickly closed the door. We never spoke one word to each other, not "hi" or "good morning." She hated that she had to take in two Jewish survivors, and knew that her husband would have known that Paula, a citizen of his own town was still alive, and maybe he would turn around in his grave.

Inside the Russian Zone

When the first Russian soldiers told all the citizens: "Your money is not worth a thing anymore. From now on we are going to use Stalin money."

So, people were so scared; many threw all their German marks, which weren't worth much anyhow, on the street and waited for the new Stalin money to come out. But, after a day, we found out it was just a lie. People tried to get their money back. Paula told me she picked up about 3,000 marks on the street because by the time people realized it was just a joke, it was too late. People were scared of the Russians, especially the young girls. Most didn't leave their apartment or house; they didn't dare go out on the street.

We had special identification cards with us, so the Russian soldiers treated us pretty good. Once in a while we talked to a Russian officer and we found out many of them were Jewish. On Thursdays or Fridays, the officers would come to us and give us extra bread and sausage and wish us a good *shabbos*. So, at least someone was thinking of us. We got better food rations than the other ones. Many times they would take a little wagon to pile all the stuff to take home. After we were alone for some time, another man who was with us in Neuendorf and with us in the camp, came to Arnstadt, and he stayed in our room because it was a big room. Little by little there came another girl to Arnstadt from Neuendorf and she stayed in our room. So we had four people in one room together.

The Russian soldiers treated us pretty good. When we wanted to go to the nearby city of Erfurt, they let us stay with them in first or second class and the other people had to crowd in the rest of the train. But, when you sit together with those guys, you live with these people, you pick up some Russian words. For instance they told us, *tovarisch* means comrade I'm *jiffre* or Jewish. Or, *dobra* is good. The non-Jewish citizens picked up the same words too.

Living in Arnstadt for a few months, we heard that President Truman released a quota for 100,000 survivors to come to the United States. He actually suggested that survivors be admitted to Palestine. So, we decided we wanted to go to America, but we had to go to the American Zone in Bavaria. It was very hard to cross the border from the Russian Zone to the American Zone. You were warned many times the Russian border guards were so trigger happy they were just waiting for an excuse to kill people. So, we asked somebody living close to the border and they said, "If I were you, I wouldn't even try it."

One night we made up our minds, we were going to cross the border. We decided to cross to a small town named Hof. We took our

little belongings with us. A bunch of German citizens joined us. So, we went through the forest and after a few hundred feet we heard the first commando in Russian.

"*Stoy*" (stop)

I told Paula, "Let's get going."

So, after another few hundred feet another commando came. "*Stoy*."

Then I told Paula, "It's no use. We better surrender. I don't want to be shot after what we experienced I don't want to be shot by a Russian border guard. Let's surrender and see what happens."

So, the soldiers took us to the Russian commandant. Everybody in the group all of sudden screamed, "*tovarisch jiffre*."

The Russian commandant said, "I didn't know there were only Jewish people living in Germany, not Nazis? That's funny." While we were waiting there was a young Russian soldier who went to the commandant and whispered something in the commandant's ear.

The commandant said, "*Dobra*" – very good. So, the young soldier, who must have been Jewish, went to the first German guy.

"*tovarisch jiffre*?"

"Yes, sure *tovarisch jiffre*."

"Can you say a Jewish prayer?" "I never heard of a Jewish prayer." So, he went to the other one, "you are *tovarisch jiffre*, Jew?"

"Yes, yes."

"Can you say a Jewish prayer?"

"I didn't know the Jews had a special prayer." He went from one German person to another one. But, when he came to Paula and me he said, "You are *tovarisch jiffre*?"

"Yes, we are *tovarisch jiffre*"

"Can you say a Jewish prayer? We learned a Jewish prayer in Sunday school in the synagogue. Say something."

So, here we said, *She ma Y israel,Adonoi Elohenu, Adonoi Ehad*."

So, he went to the commandant and said, "Those are the only two Jews. The rest are all non-Jews." The commandant got so mad. He said, "I'll give you one or two minutes and if you don't get out of this darn room and go back where you came from, you darn Nazis, I'll kill all of you. Get going." Everyone was scared and rushed out and we were the only ones left in the room with the commandant.

So, he said, "Tell me, why do you want to leave the Russian Zone? Aren't we good to you?"

"Sure, you are good to us."

"Then why do you want to leave?" At the last second, I had a little lie, and I told the commandant, "Because you are so good to us we would like

to pick up our parents in Bavaria, in the American Zone, to bring back to you because you treated us so nice."

"So, how long will it take?"

"Tomorrow?"

"No, tomorrow we are going to meet our parents (even though we knew they didn't make it), so how about the next day."

"O.K." So, he let us go.

The first German citizen we met on the other side of the border said, "How in the heck did you make it over the border alive?" We told him the little story and he said, "You sure out smarted that guy." Of course, I never saw that Russian Commandant again.

In Fuerth there were many survivors

Paula and I went to Fuerth, (near Nuremberg). There were many survivors and it was a very orthodox community. I got a job at the Jewish Federation translating whatever came up and distributing food. I worked in an office.

We received every week from Sweden care-packages, with all kinds of food, tobacco, chocolate and cocoa, whatever you can think of. We in the office had to divide the goodies into different packages. For instance for a husband, wife and child, the husband got tobacco and cigarettes. The wife got coffee, cocoa and bread. The child got candies and cookies. So, every Wed. Thurs. they came and stood in line to receive the care packages for Friday, *Shabbos.*

Most were Polish survivors and they spoke mostly Yiddish. So, my boss said, "Stern, you have to learn Yiddish."

"I am too old to learn Yiddish."

"Do the best you can."

I remember once a couple came and I asked how many kids they had and they said, "We have one child."

"Ok, fine. For your husband tobacco and cigarettes and you can have some bread, coffee and cocoa and your child can have some candies and cookies."

Next week the same couple came and I heard the same couple say, "He doesn't understand Yiddish we will tell him we have two children." So, I acted like I didn't hear anything.

They came to the front and I said, "How many children do you have?"

"Oh, we have *zwei kinder*."

"Oh, that's funny. Last week you had one child and I didn't notice you were pregnant or anything. How come you have two children?"

The wife said to the husband, "*Oy gevalt*. He understands Yiddish." That was a funny experience for me.

The trip to America

In time we got our papers together to come to America. You had to have a birth certificate and a paper from the police that you never got in trouble. For Paula it was very easy to get a birth certificate but for me it was difficult. I was born in Breslau which is now Polish. So, I sent a note to Breslau asking for my birth certificate. My card came back with a rubber stamp in Polish, "City hall doesn't exist anymore. It was bombed out during the war." So, I took this card to the colonel of the American embassy and explained to him. He considered my papers good anyway. There was another woman from Breslau and she used my card the same way and the colonel from the American embassy accepted her papers as well.

In order to come to America we had to go to Munich and we lived for three to four weeks in a quarantine camp to see that everything was alright with us and there we met two friends that we knew from the farm, Neuendorf, years ago. We all had the same idea in mind: to go to America. We also met the brother of the rabbi from Seattle and his family, Mr. and Mrs. George Cohn and their daughter. When they heard we were going to Seattle they were very happy that we were going to meet again. But, when we were in the quarantine camp we found out there was a ship strike, and no boat left America to pick us up.

One day they found a troop ship that was going back to America and on *erev Rosh Hashanah*1946, a Jewish chaplain, Rabbi Eisendrath came to us to find ten pregnant women in Munich. He came to Paula and told her, "I have passage for you to go to America, but only for ten pregnant women."

Paula said, "Forget about it. We were separated for twenty eight months. I'm not going to leave my husband here. Forget about it."

When we were still in Fuerth, Paula had to go to a doctor. She worked together with the American embassy and she told Paula, who was in her fifth month, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Stern, I cannot let you go. Anyone over three months has to stay back."

Paula got really excited, of course she really wanted to go to America so badly. "Who in the heck is pregnant? Are you pregnant or am I pregnant? I know better."

"Mrs. Stern, if you are so sure of yourself then maybe I made a mistake." The doctor let her go and of course Paula made it to Munich

and then Bremen. Then ten days later on Yom Kippur 1946, the night the chaplain came again, "I got good news for you. I finally got ten passages for your husbands."

Now Paula said, "Now you are talking. Like I told you I wouldn't have gone by myself."

Seattle, Butte, or Australia?

When we were still in Munich I wrote a letter to my great-aunt and great-uncle in Montana. I introduced myself as the son of Hedy Nossen. The son of the woman who had come to visit in 1910 with my grandmother. I didn't know the address. All I had was: Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Pincus, Butte, Montana USA.

The letter arrived. They sent that letter to my uncle, Dr. Herman Nossen who had made his way to Seattle, (Dr. Herman Nossen was the youngest brother of my mother, and he was the doctor who delivered me in Breslau, Germany). When he found out that we were coming to America, he sent a letter to my mother's cousin, Emmanuel Pincus who picked us up from the ship in New York. I was so surprised. He told me I looked like my mother. I didn't know how everything came together. In the letter he told us he was a doctor in Seattle and since we were the only survivors of the family, he would like to have us come to Seattle and start a new life.

We also had a permit from Paula's brother who lived in Sydney, Australia who left Germany in 1938. We could have gone to Australia. When my uncle heard that he said, "Even if you go to Australia you have to come to the West Coast anyhow so stay with us and you can make up your mind." He was very happy that we had made the decision to come to Seattle after all this time, because we were the last ones of all the family.

The trip itself was something else. It was October 1946 and as soon as we entered the English Channel a storm broke loose and the ship was shaking like mad. All the dishes were broken and I was so sea sick that I couldn't eat anything, and Paula was afraid to get out of the bed. Someone from the crew came and thought Paula was sick and brought her some tea and toast just to keep her going. But I couldn't eat anything.

I forgot how long it took now, but little by little we came closer to America. Of course the German-American passengers gave us dirty looks because we were the only refugees who were survivors. They didn't want much to do with us.

There was a young girl with a fur coat on. She told us she was from Hamburg and said, "My parents and I are just going to renew our papers

and then we are going back to Germany. We live in a nice villa and have a maid. We would never stay in America."

But, when we came closer to America and saw the Statue of Liberty, a guy said, "Now you refugees you don't have to rush to the front. First came the German-American citizens."

Finally we arrived and just before the captain of the ship announced ten couples, this name and that, and, "The Sterns, please come to the front and you will be the first one off the boat."

When we marched forward I gave those guys dirty looks and said, "Look who comes first. Not you guys, we come first."

So, we came down and all of a sudden a man walked up to me.

He said, "You must be the son of Hedy Stern. I'm a cousin of your mother. You look so much like your mother that I was so sure it was you. I'm so happy you made it."

We were picked up by an American officer, Mrs. Goldman,. We were together with her in Nuremberg at Seder in 1946 and she told American customs, "You don't have to search those people. They are survivors, they don't have anything."

They let us go through without any trouble. We could have brought over a million diamonds or something, but we didn't have anything. So, we went to the hotel and put our stuff down and in the evening we were invited to the cousin of my mother and they were very nice to us. But, when we were ready to tell them what we went through they told us, "Forget about it-- you are in a different country. The past is past."

The same thing happened with Paula's relatives. "You are in a nice free country now. It's everything behind us." We were kind of depressed that nobody gave us a chance to talk about it.

Mazel Tov!

We stayed in New York for three or four weeks where we met all of Paula's relatives, and we went to the same restaurant everyday, to eat lunch or dinner. It was a kosher restaurant. There were many other people there, and they had good food. I remember that when the waiter once in a while dropped a dish, everyone would just scream "*Mazel Tov*!" Everyone joined in, even if some didn't know what it meant.

I remember one day there was a big noise and we asked what happened. One man was sitting at the table and one of the waiters came to him and asked him, "Where do you come from."

The man said, "I come from Poland. I was in Auschwitz."

The waiter said, "Where in Poland?"

He said, "Oh a small town you wouldn't know the name."
He said, "Tell me the name." So the man told him the city.
The waiter said, "Oh I came over from the same town too.
What is your name?" The man told him, "My name is so and so."
The waiter started to cry and said, "You are my brother. I left the country in the early '30s. Where are my parents?" And the guy told him what had happened, and there was crying and hugging and hugging. By chance they found each other in a restaurant in the big city of New York, it was a very tearful union for us too.

In New York I met another friend, Marcus. We worked together in Auschwitz in the same *kommando* and we walked together in the death march. We were divided in Gleiwitz. He went to Bergen-Belsen and I went to Berlin-Sachsenhausen. Marcus lost his father and younger brother, so we all had the same story to tell each other. We found out there was another couple living in New York, Gerd and Inge Bocian. We were together in Neuendorf before the war. They just had a baby boy and of course we wanted to visit with them and see the new baby. So we took the subway to Brooklyn and when we got out I didn't know the area well and I asked a policeman, in my good English, "Where is Onion Street?" (instead of Union Street)

The policeman looked at me and answered me with directions in perfect German. I was so surprised; I asked "How do you know we are from Germany?"

The policeman answered, "The way you speak English and the way you are dressed, I can tell you, you have not been here longer than one or two weeks, right?"

"Right."

"In my district here I have to know a little bit German, Spanish and Yiddish." That was a funny surprise.

Then came the time to leave for Seattle. We had to take the Pullman train. It was a four-day trip from New York to Seattle with one-day stopover in Chicago. A woman from the Jewish Committee took us to the station and said, "I couldn't find one woman out of 100 in New York who would go in your condition on a 4 day trip." (Paula was pregnant in her 6th month).

We told her, "What are you talking about? We took a seven hour railroad-car train ride from Munich to Bremen. But there is no comparison."

What a train! We had an elegant sleeper and an elegant diner. You could get your shoes shined at night for the next morning. We felt like royalty. When we arrived in Chicago, we were picked up by my aunt's sister. She

had a nice apartment next to Lake Michigan. The next day we went back on the train to get to Seattle. We really could see how big the United States is as we went through Montana with plenty of snow. When we arrived in Seattle it was pouring. It was November. My uncle picked us up and first showed us his apartment and then he showed us where we were going to live.

Early years in Seattle

At that time it was hard to find an apartment for a couple with a baby. My uncle and aunt looked around and couldn't find anything, so they got us a nice big room in a Jewish boarding house for the time being. He took us to our new housing. It was a nice room, but in one room we had to put up with it.

After we settled a few days my uncle said, "Now you have to meet the director from the Jewish Child and Family Services. You are the first survivor couple to come to Seattle and she would like to meet you."

So we went to the Jewish Family Service and we tried to meet the director. We came in and waited and finally a staff member came out.

"Mrs. Kaufman is very busy today but as soon as you have the baby buy anything you want. Mrs. Kaufman will see you then." So, then we went shopping. Paula bought one outfit for the baby, some diapers, and a blanket. The whole thing came to exactly $19.75.

Naming Marion

The big day arrived. Our daughter Marion was born. What a joy. When it came to choosing the name Marion there was a little story behind it. Paula worked in Auschwitz with another woman in the ammunitions factory called the Union.

And they talked, "When we ever get out of here alive and we have children, let's call our daughters the first name Marion." It was a nice name at the time. So, when our daughter was born we named her Marion. Our daughter was born on the 29th of January, 1947 and Ilse, Paula's friend from Auschwitz, had a daughter born on the second of February, 1947. Of course they promised each other to name the girls Marion, that's why we chose the name Marion.

When the baby was born they kept Paula for ten days in the hospital. As soon as we were ready we went to the Jewish Family and Child Services; after all they wanted to see the newborn baby.

So, we went up to the office and asked to see Mrs. Kaufman again. We waited and waited and pretty soon out came a staff member again

and "Mrs. Kaufman is very busy today. Do you have a receipt for the stuff you bought?" So, we gave her the receipt and she went back and told us, "Never mind, Mrs. Kaufman said it was $19.75. Here is $20 and congratulations and have a good time." That was our first experience with the Jewish Family and Child Services in Seattle.

Truly the Jewish Family Center and the whole community did not know how to deal with us as survivors in the early years. Today with so much education, we all understand better that survivors need community support. I am now on a committee at the Jewish Family Service that is working with the needs of older Holocaust survivors.

Working life at Langendorf Bakeries

In the meantime we met Rabbi Franklin Cohn, from Herzl Conservative Congregation. Since we met his brother in Munich, we brought him greetings from his brother; when he found out that I was born in Breslau he was especially nice to me because he was from the same place. He was close with the manager at Langendof Bakeries, Mr. Lou Blackfield, who was president of B'nai Brith and he gave me a job at there.

I started working at Langendorf United Bakeries, Inc. in January 1947. It was a big wholesale outfit. There were seven branches all over the West Coast. My first job was in the production company, I met the lady that was in charge of the women,(her name was Emma) and she asked me, "And what is your name?"

I answered "Klaus."

"Oh my gosh!"

"What is wrong with my name?"

"You know, your name reminds me of Santa Claus…Christmas, shopping, gifts, and so on…and I didn't even pay for all my gifts yet, and every time I call you I think about Christmas! Can I maybe call you by another name? How about John or Johnny?"

"Go ahead, I don't care." So my new name got around fast, and from that time on, I was only known all over as Johnny.

Years later, one of my bosses tried to get me on one of my days off and told me: "I had a heck of a time trying to find you! I tried John Stern that has a business in the University village, and looked all over for another John Stern! What is your real name?"

So I told him, "Well, my real name is Klaus, but I was renamed when I found my work here at Langendorf Bakeries, Inc.."

High holidays came around and Lou Blackfield came around and said

to me; "When you take your three days off, I will get somebody to take your place. We will pay you, don't worry."

I had an English manager after Lou Blackfield, and he kept the tradition going when the holidays came back around. But we had another Jewish guy in the office who only took one day off for Yom Kippur.

"You know, since they pay you, don't take advantage of the company," he said, "maybe you should change it to this way."

So after I heard about this: "No, no, you go ahead and take your days off, the manager said, "and we will pay you."

After he was gone, I had an Italian manager, who said: "I understand that you take your three days off because we pay you, you know we can't do that anymore…, so I suppose you won't take your days off anymore after we don't pay."

I said "I'll take my two days for Rosh Hashanah and one for Yom Kippur, like always whether you pay me or not."

And he said "I understand that you people pray all day in your synagogues or temples for your sins. Is that right?"

I said; "No Pete, it takes me about one hour to pray for my sins, the rest of the day I pray for your sins, and the sins of the rest of the world." He never bothered me again.

I worked at Langendorf for almost 36 years. I outlasted five managers. Like they say, generals come and go, but privates stay.

Uncle Herman delivers again

My Uncle Herman, the doctor, delivered our daughter and just to remind you he delivered me in 1921. What a time between! He was so proud he felt like he was the baby's grandfather.

It was very hard to find an apartment with a newborn baby. Sometimes I went to an apartment house, there was a sign "No dogs or babies allowed." First the dogs, then the babies. Finally, my relatives found us a room in a Jewish home and we stayed there with the baby for several months until a friend of ours found a one-room apartment in a duplex. We had a big room with a wall-bed and a big kitchen in the apartment where we put the crib for the baby, with the icebox in those days. We stayed there for several months and then we were able to find an apartment, which belonged to the cantor Joseph Schiffman of Herzl Congregation. He made a point to take young couples with babies or kids into his apartment-house as a kind of a *mitzvah*… We were so grateful we finally had our own apartment.

We joined the Jewish Club of Washington, an organization of

newcomers who came from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and some people who had to first go to South America to save their lives, but then ended up in Seattle. We had nice programs and we helped each other out for jobs and apartments. We made fast friends; after all we had mostly the same background. I was president later on for 17 years.

On February 11, 1952 our son Marvin was born. He was born the same day as my late-father's birthday. Now we had a boy who would keep the Stern family name going, because at that time I was the only Stern alive of the big family that perished during the Holocaust, except one cousin who saved his life by going to Shanghai, but died in 1951. So, now we had a girl and a boy which was a very happy occasion for us. Again my uncle was pretty proud. It had become a family tradition. First he delivered me as a young doctor in 1921, then my daughter, 1947, and then my son, 1952, so it stayed in the family.

Little by little our one bedroom apartment with a little den became too small for us. We had to make up our mind to move. I got some money together to make a down payment on a nice home in the Mountlake District. We had four bedrooms, a big backyard and it wasn't too far from my work. We had an extra bedroom available which we always rented out to students since we were close to UW. We had some Jewish and other students sometimes and Paula would give them room and board and they felt pretty good in our place.

The last of the big family

My uncle really worked too hard. There was a surgery in the morning, office hours the rest of the day, sometimes house calls (in those days, doctors did that) and in summer 1951 he had his first heart attack. He was advised by other doctors to give something up. If he did surgeries, let somebody else take over the office. Do something for your own health.

But, my uncle always said, "Patients want to be treated by me. They want to see me and not somebody else. I will still work hard." In December 1952, he had a heart attack in a patient's home, and died. The last of the big family. It was really a sad day for us. My uncle was a very well known doctor in Seattle. He was associated with Virginia Mason. And when we had the memorial at Herzl Congregation the synagogue was packed. It was a shock to all of us and people who knew him. He was only 58 years old.

In 1953, Hanukkah, I brought the first puppy home in a shoebox, a little cocker spaniel. It was a big thing for the children. It was something brand new for all of us; we had never had dogs before. In the '50's my Aunt Alice decided to sell the home and move to San Francisco to be closer to her brother and sister. Later on I met my great-aunt from Montana who gave us the affidavit in the '30s. It was a great joy to see someone from the family who I had never known before.

In January 1960, our daughter Marion had her Bat Mitzvah. And in February 1965, our son Marvin had his Bar Mitzvah. In the meantime our children were growing up. 1971 our daughter got married. In 1970 Marvin left for New York, Yeshiva University. Later on he moved to the Theological Seminary in New York and then went on to study in Israel at Hebrew University. His teacher was the Holocaust expert Yehuda Bauer. Marvin stayed there for four years and learned everything about the Holocaust, which helped him later on to get a job with the Anti-Defamation League in Seattle. He was later director for 13 years.

December 1972 we became grandparents. Our first grandchild, Rebecca was born. It was a big joy for us. In 1977, our second granddaughter was born, Leah, and we had a joy to see them grow up. It's nice to live in the same city. We would spoil them and they would stay overnight with us many times. It's good to have the family together.

Paula always wanted to see her brother again. Paula's brother who was much older was lucky enough to make it to Australia in 1938, so Paula hadn't seen her brother for 37 years. Finally in 1975 we went to Australia to meet her brother and her sister-in-law, and niece, and we all had a happy reunion.

In 1985 our son Marvin got married to Michele Pachter from Philadelphia. They had a son Rafi in 1989, and a daughter Shira who was born in 1992. Now we have four grandchildren. Who would have thought that we, the emaciated prisoners barely existing behind those electric barbed wire fences, would ever be liberated, find each other, and be able to raise a family.

"Stern wants a roundtrip ticket or he won't go."

In 1959, September I was asked by the German government to come to Germany and to testify against the sergeant major of our camp, Auschwitz III, Oberscharfuehrer Bernhard Rackers. I was interviewed some time

before so they asked me to represent the West Coast. For the East Coast they asked my friend Norbert Wollheim, the one I worked with everyday, to come and testify against the guy.

I really didn't want to go; Paula said it was too much excitement for me. When Paula and I left Germany in October 1946 we made up our minds to never go back again. For instance, Berlin invited me as a former Berliner to come in the '50s to Berlin, everything paid: two weeks in a hotel, concert tickets, everything free, but I said, "I'm not going back." But, when I was asked in 1959 to go and testify against the Nazi commandant I went because I felt it was my duty.

I went to the rabbi of Herzl Congregation and he told me, as one of the few survivors, it was my duty to go. So, I went to the German consul here to get my tickets. When I came to the consulate they handed me a ticket from Seattle to Dusseldorf. I told them, "I would like to have a round-trip ticket. Seattle-Dusseldorf, Dusseldorf-Seattle."

He asked me, "Don't you trust the German people?"

I said, "Sir, don't ask me that question. If I don't get my roundtrip ticket, I won't go to Germany to testify."

So, he sent a telegram to Germany, "Stern wants a roundtrip ticket or he won't go." So, a few days later I had my roundtrip ticket. It was a funny feeling to go back to Germany. But, I figured I had to do it.

On the day of the trial the prosecutor slipped into the side-door of the hotel and told us, "I want to tell you one thing. Don't be too fast with your answers or they will know right away that you are biased against the guy. Think over before you say anything." He disappeared; he wasn't supposed to tell us that.

So, the trial started and they brought the former Commandant into the chamber. I was asked by the judge, "Do you remember the guy?"

He came a little bit closer and I said, "Yes, that's the guy I remember."

"Does he look different now?"

"Sure, the last time I saw him he was coming in with a tailored uniform, high boots, and a whip in his hand. Today of course he looks different, but the face I won't forget"

When I gave my testimony there were some Germans in the back and they made some remarks and the judge said, "If I hear a peep out of you I will throw you all out of the chamber."

My friend and I testified for three days. The commandant was about fifty

six years old at the time and he got a thirty year sentence in the prison.

When I came back to Seattle everybody wanted to know what went on about the trial. I think I wrote a few articles about the trial. I think I did my part.

Talking to children about the Holocaust

In summer of 1973 I was asked by the young Rabbi Levine from Temple De Hirsch to come to summer camp near Seattle. At that time Temple De Hirsch had Raphael Levine, the retired senior rabbi, and a young Rabbi Levine. He took me to the summer camp and there was a young group of teenagers who wanted to know about the Holocaust because their parents never talked about it. So, that was really the first time I started talking to children or students about the Holocaust.

Later on I went to schools to talk about my experiences. Three times I went to Montana for a week each and I went to Whitman College in Walla Walla. In Montana I was invited by the Montana Human Rights Network in Helena. My program was always to speak two different times a day to the different high schools in the evening and another public presentation.

It was a very interesting trip for me. I had all these big hopes…maybe those people had never seen a Jewish person, or a survivor before in their lives.

In Pablo a young high school student came to me and said; "You know, I am the only Jewish boy here in town."

"How come?"

"I'm here because my father is a teacher at the University in Missoula." He thanked me for coming and speaking about the Holocaust.

Another place was Eureka, Montana. It was a small town about 2500-3000 people. They had one little hall to meet, which had about 120 people. The guy in charge asked another guy, "Do you think we're going to get 75 people to come tonight?" So here my schedule was for about 8 p.m., here came the people 50, 60, 80, 100, 120, 130…and one guy said "wait a minute, we cannot have more than 120 people in that hall, or we get in trouble with the fire department, we have to move to the nearby church…So people I'm sorry I have to ask you to move now to this church, cause we have too many people and we can't fit them all in this room."

So they moved us to the church which had about 300-350 people, and in no time the church was filled up so the guy in charge said "You teenagers please you sit down on the floor and let the older people sit on the seats." I talked there for and hour and a half, and people were applauding and surprised, and it was something special. After that they had a big reception for me, I felt really good.

In Helena, there was another case, a Jewish family that I stayed with overnight, who said "you know our boy was the last one that had a Bar Mitzvah in the town. We had to sell our synagogue. It was turned into a church and once or twice we have a guest rabbi here, and for the high holidays, families from around Helena come here and everyone gets their money together for a decent service."

On my last trip to Montana, finally I came to Butte. I understood before they closed the mines down, Butte had a very nice Jewish population. The time I went to speak at the schools, a lady from the Jewish Committee took me around and she took me also to the Jewish cemetery. It was a snowy day, and after looking around we finally found the grave of my great-aunt and uncle, Cora and Jacob Pincus Here I stood in silence before the graves, and I had to think here was a couple who did the best to help us to leave Germany before everything happened and I never did meet them before. My great-uncle died in the early 1940's; my Great-aunt Cora had a chance to move to Seattle, but died in the late 1960's. It was a memorable trip for me.

90 out of 12,000

In spring 1998 I got an invitation from the Fritz Bauer Institute, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, a human rights institute that does research on the Holocaust, especially the IG. Farben Industries, where I did my slave labor in Auschwitz. So, I got a little soft? I was promised to see people I hadn't seen for 50 years. Paula was invited too, but she said, "I'm not going. Like I told you,." She kept her promise but I didn't.

So, I went back to Germany. We had former inmates from Auschwitz III from all over the world: France, England, South America, New Zealand, Germany, Israel and it was a four to five day program. It was good to see some people I didn't even know were still alive.

We marched out of Auschwitz January 18, 1945. From our section

there were 12,000 people. After the war, I found out after we marched from one camp to another, out of the 12,000 people 2-3,000 made it alive. Out of the 2,500 left over from the death march, they figured 250 men are still alive all over the world. Out of the 250, 90 showed up, some brought their wives along, some brought their kids along and it was a wonderful feeling to see people you hadn't seen for 50 years, some you thought would never make it. We had good programs and we were invited to the different exhibits and had dinner with the mayor and other important council members. We went to different high schools and talked about our experiences.

A return to Aurich

Again, in March 2004 I was asked again to come to Frankfurt. Knowing Paula didn't want to go, I said, "I'm not able to travel very much by myself." So, they asked me to bring my son along. This time after I accepted the trip to Frankfurt I had another good idea. I wanted to go to Aurich, northwest Germany where I worked in the 1930s and had some good times and later on some bad memories. We left Seattle two days before the meeting and I went alone to Aurich.

In the morning, Guenther Luebbers, who was in charge of Jewish Affairs, picked me up from the hotel and we went to the Jewish Cemetery. I said *Kaddish* for my friend Bernie's grandparents. I looked around and saw many names that I remembered even though it was 60 years ago. Then he took me to the Museum of History and there was a section showing the life of the Jews in Aurich. I found one stand with a Torah and the woman in charge explained to me the Torah was brought back from Argentina. In 1938, *Kristallnacht*, a man called Max Wolf, saved and hid the Torah. He left Germany in 1939 and went to Argentina and took the Torah with him. He had two sons and when the father died, the sons came to the reunion in 1990 and brought the Torah back. They left the Torah as a symbol of the life of former Jews in Aurich.

A reporter/ author from the only local town paper came over to the museum and I told him everything I remembered from 1935-38, the good times and the bad times. Guenther also said to the guy, "Remember this man was here 65 years ago. It's amazing he found his way back here to our town."

Wherever we went Guenther took pictures of me and sometimes he put himself in the picture. He must have known many people in Aurich. After the Museum, he took me to the Holocaust memorial, which was built on the former grounds of the synagogue. It was a very simple memorial, five pillars with all the names of former *Auricher* Jews engraved. When I saw the names I remembered many names and some sad memories came back to me.

He took me to a small department store which was run by the son of the former owner. Guenther explained to him, "This man worked for the company Sally Goldschmidt, 65 years ago. I suppose it was a little competition to this department store."

We went to the street where the Jewish people had lived; there was a shoemaker, a carpenter. In the afternoon we had a reception with the mayor of the town. We were invited about three or four o'clock. The mayor was a very nice woman; she wanted to know everything about my life.

When I asked her, "Was Aurich very much damaged during the war?"

"No, the former mayor had enough brains. First we had a bunch of prisoners from the Neuengamme concentration camp and they dug big trenches around the town."

"Did you know those people were from the camps?"

"Yes, mostly Jewish-Dutch prisoners in the striped uniforms. But, three to four days before the war ended the mayor surrendered the town to the Canadian army, which was supposed to take the town over and almost nothing happened to the town." Like I said, we stayed there for about two hours and we had a very nice talk. At least somebody admitted there was a concentration camp not too far away and, yes, there were some prisoners digging ditches around the town.

Most of the time people said, "Oh we didn't know there was a camp nearby." So, I was satisfied that somebody told the true story about the nearby concentration camp. It was an interesting and eventful day for me. I saw many things and met a few people. He took me back to the hotel and thanked me very much that I kept my promise and came to Aurich. He promised we would keep in touch.

I left the hotel very early the next morning. I went out on the floor and found a big bag in front of the door with a label "Compliments from the hotel. Have a good trip." There were sandwiches and fruits. I think it was

a very nice gesture. So, I had to take the bus to the train and it took me another five hours to get back to Frankfurt. This time, in Frankfurt only seventy five people showed up.

In the morning we talked to high school students, in the afternoon they took us to different exhibits. I went to the Mark Chagall exhibit which was outstanding. We had a reception with the mayor again. One day they took us to the opening of the Auschwitz exhibit. We were the first ones to see it. You went through the rows and saw the pictures of the people and their testimonies. All they said was that they followed orders and they did nothing wrong. It gives you a shudder.

I say everything was very well arranged. The students were with us from the very early morning and did anything they could do for us and they wouldn't take any money at all. The last night before we left, we went to a hotel and invited all the students, at least 30 students, and we took them out for dinner. At least we could show them how much we appreciated their help. They showed us good will until the very end. It took us 14.5 hours to come home. It was a wonderful trip, but I must say I had enough, no more.

Life goes on back home

Back home in Seattle I had a chance to talk to people about my trip. Now I'm speaking to different schools and life goes on. That we both made it is a miracle. We have lived here in Seattle since the fall of 1946. We are lucky to have our daughter and son and their families living here also. In 1989 I became a board member and speaker for the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center. I consider what I do very important to keep on going. We are the last witnesses of those terrible times.

Like I said before, we have so much in common, we both love nature. Both of us, Paula has a green thumb, she likes flowers and plants. Our family room is full of plants. And, I like to work in the yard and grow vegetables. But our biggest love is dogs. We have had dogs for over fifty years. Mostly always two dogs. Our dogs have a really good home. I must say our dogs have a better home than some children. The only bad thing is when you have to put a dog down. It really makes you feel bad. It's like you lose part of the family. We just had another experience. We lost our beautiful rust-brown Rhodesian Ridgeback, Sheba, after almost eleven years.

I have had the chance to talk to many people in the synagogues and in the Jewish community, and when it came to the Holocaust, we were told many times; "Oh yes, there are some grandparents, great grandparents, or aunts or uncles who lived in European countries at the time. Some we've never met, but we've heard of, who perished in the Holocaust."

How proud your families and relatives would have been to see what you are doing in your lives and today what you have accomplished? Why don't you, for the memories of your departed ones, become a member of the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center or make a special donation when it comes on *Yom Hashoah.*

In 2007, I made another memorable trip. This time it was to Sitka, Alaska. I was invited there by the community represented by Lisa Busch. I traveled there with three staff members of the Holocaust Center and talked to four schools and a community program. 800 people in all who had never met a Holocaust survivor or heard a story before. I was on a television talk show, on NPR Radio, and on the front page of the newspaper. I was glad I went and was glad that the community and teachers would be able to teach about the Holocaust in the future.

So that's the story of my life. In August 2007, Paula and I celebrated our 65th wedding anniversary. When I look back on our lives and what we have experienced and how we were separated for twenty eight months and found each other again it is a miracle. Yes, miracles do happen. Over the many years we were among the first if not the first of the survivors to come and stay in Seattle, Washington.

If somebody asks me, "Have you lived here in Seattle all the time since you came to the United States?" The answer is, "Not yet."

Afterthought:

When we arrived in America in the Fall of 1946 nobody wanted to listen to us, we were told forget about it, forget about that period of your life, here in America it will never happen again. And now, after 60 years, suddenly the world wants to know what really happened to us, about those dreadful years in our lives. Those of us who were lucky enough to survive are now the voices for those who did not. Thanks to the Holocaust Center's Speakers Bureau, other survivors are telling their stories to educate people about what happened in the Holocaust. Hopefully, the second generation will take over.

I end my thoughts with a poem that I wrote in April 1983 on the occasion of a get-together of Jewish Holocaust survivors in Washington D.C., on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising." It was published by the Geffen Publishing House Ltd, Jerusalem in 1989 in a booklet "Survivors Speak Out."

Remember, Forgive, Forget

"Remember" when they grabbed us and dragged us to the camps?
And the world stood in silence and asked us to "forgive"?
But the S.S. tortured us – never let us "forget" that we are Jews.

And so you "remember" when we were liberated and we were looking for our parents , sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. But they had perished – six million of them.
And the world told us "forgive" and "forget."

And do you "remember" that a new generation grew up in Israel
And they never wanted to "forgive" their parents for marching into the gas chambers like a bunch of sheep without resisting?

And do you "remember" that voices appeared telling the rest of the world that the Holocaust never happened?
And there was nothing to "forgive" and "forget".

And when the rest of us gather here in memory of our dear ones, who perished during the Holocaust, some of us like to "remember."
Some of us might be ready to "forgive"
But none of us should ever "forget."

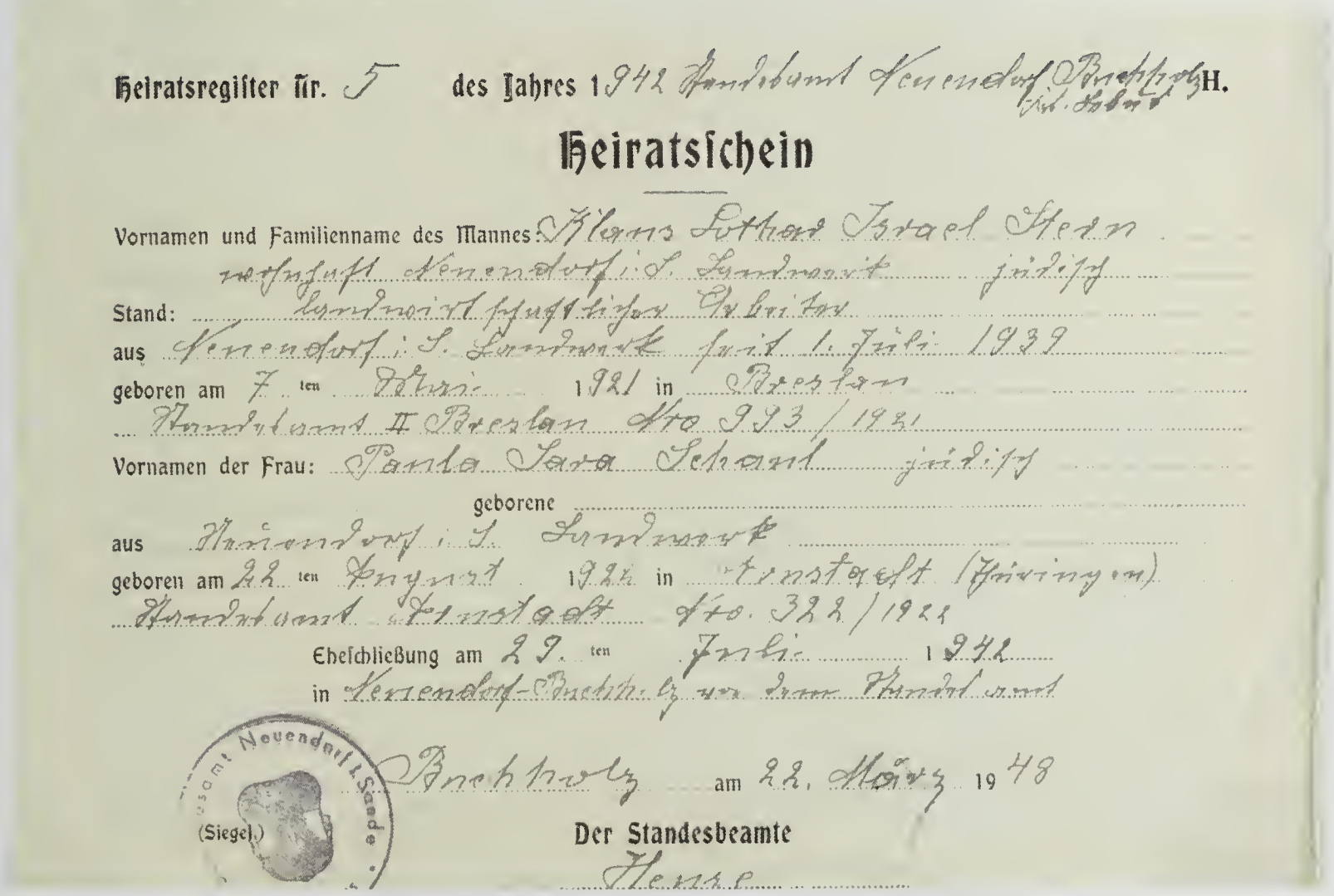
– Klaus Stern

The original copy of this poem was presented to Elie Wiesel, chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, and a former fellow inmate of the poet, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, in Washington D.C., April 11, 1983.

My mother as a young woman.

My mother and I when I was young in Berlin.
(All but two family pictures were lost. A cousin from Brazil brought these to us in 1951.)

On the farm in Neuendorf when we got engaged in May 1942. Paula gave this picture to Margot Konieanski, a friend on the farm who returned it to Paula in September of 1945 when they met again in Arnstadt.



Heiratsregister Nr. 5 des Jahres 1942 Standesamt Neuendorf (Buchholz) H.

Heiratsschein

Vornamen und Familienname des Mannes: Hans Lothar Israel Stern
wohnhaft Neuendorf i. L. Landwirt jüdisch
Stand: landwirtschaftlicher Arbeiter
aus Neuendorf i. L. Landwirt seit 1. Juli 1939
geboren am 7. ten März 1921 in Breslau
Standesamt II Breslau Nr. 933 / 1921
Vornamen der Frau: Paula Sara Schaul jüdisch
geborene
aus Neuendorf i. L. Landwirt
geboren am 22. ten Januar 1922 in Arnstadt (Thüringen)
Standesamt Arnstadt Nr. 322 / 1922
Eheschließung am 29. ten Juli 1942
in Neuendorf-Buchholz vor dem Standesamt

Buchholz am 22. März 1948

Der Standesbeamte
Heese

(Siegel) Standesamt Neuendorf i. Lande

Our wedding certificate

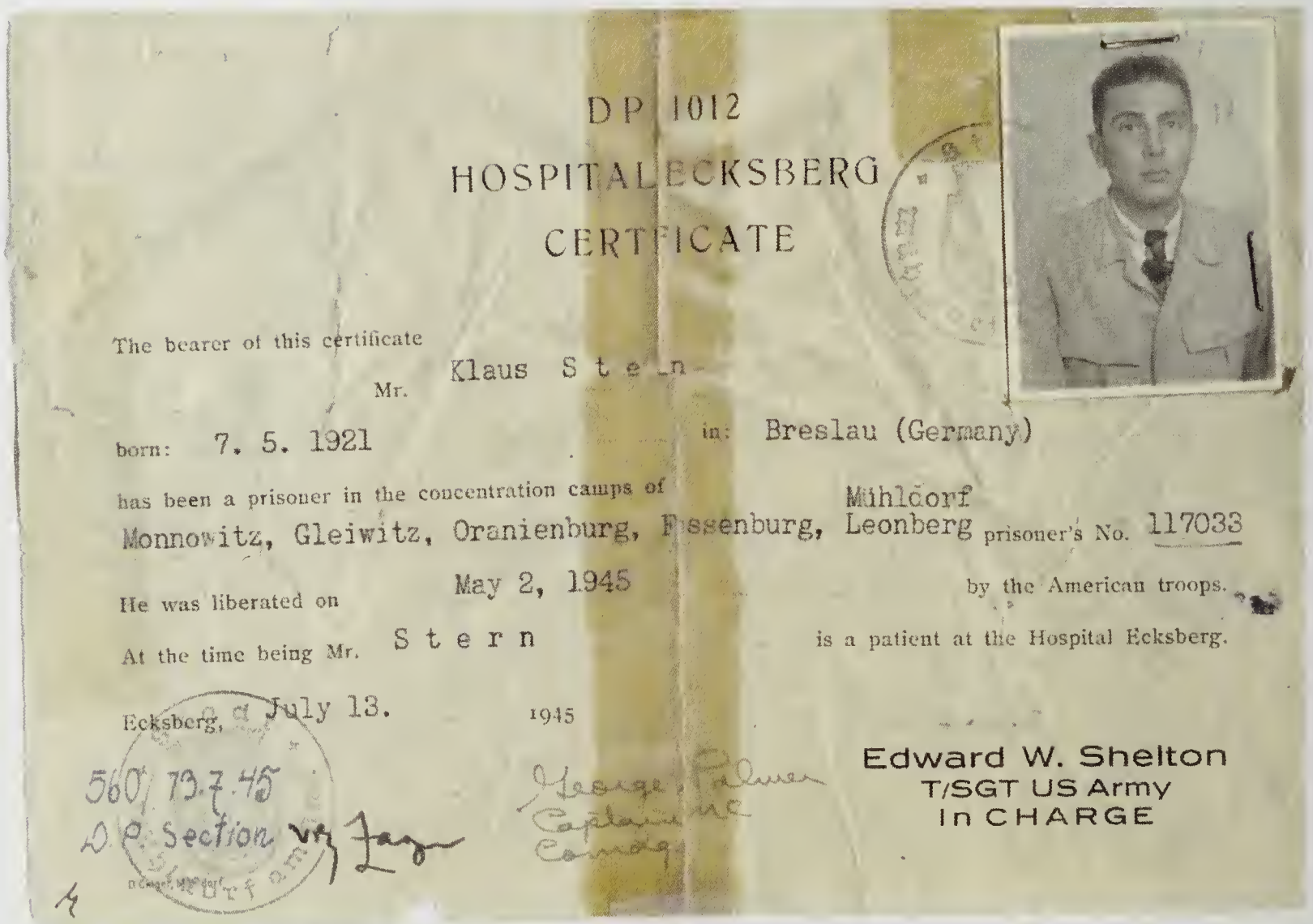
Paula as a young girl

Paula's brother Theo on his first day of school (*with Zuckertuete*), 1912

Paula with her parents, 1935

Paula with her parents and neighbors, 1928

Paula after liberation



DP 1012

HOSPITAL ECKSBERG

CERTIFICATE

The bearer of this certificate

Mr. Klaus S t e r n

born: 7. 5. 1921 in: Breslau (Germany)

has been a prisoner in the concentration camps of

Monnowitz, Gleiwitz, Oranienburg, Flossenburg, Mühldorf Leonberg prisoner's No. 117038

He was liberated on May 2, 1945 by the American troops.

At the time being Mr. S t e r n is a patient at the Hospital Ecksberg.

Ecksberg, d. July 13. 1945

560/ 13.7.45
D.P. Section

George Palmer
Captain MC
Commdg

Edward W. Shelton
T/SGT US Army
In CHARGE

Klaus' hospital release certificate

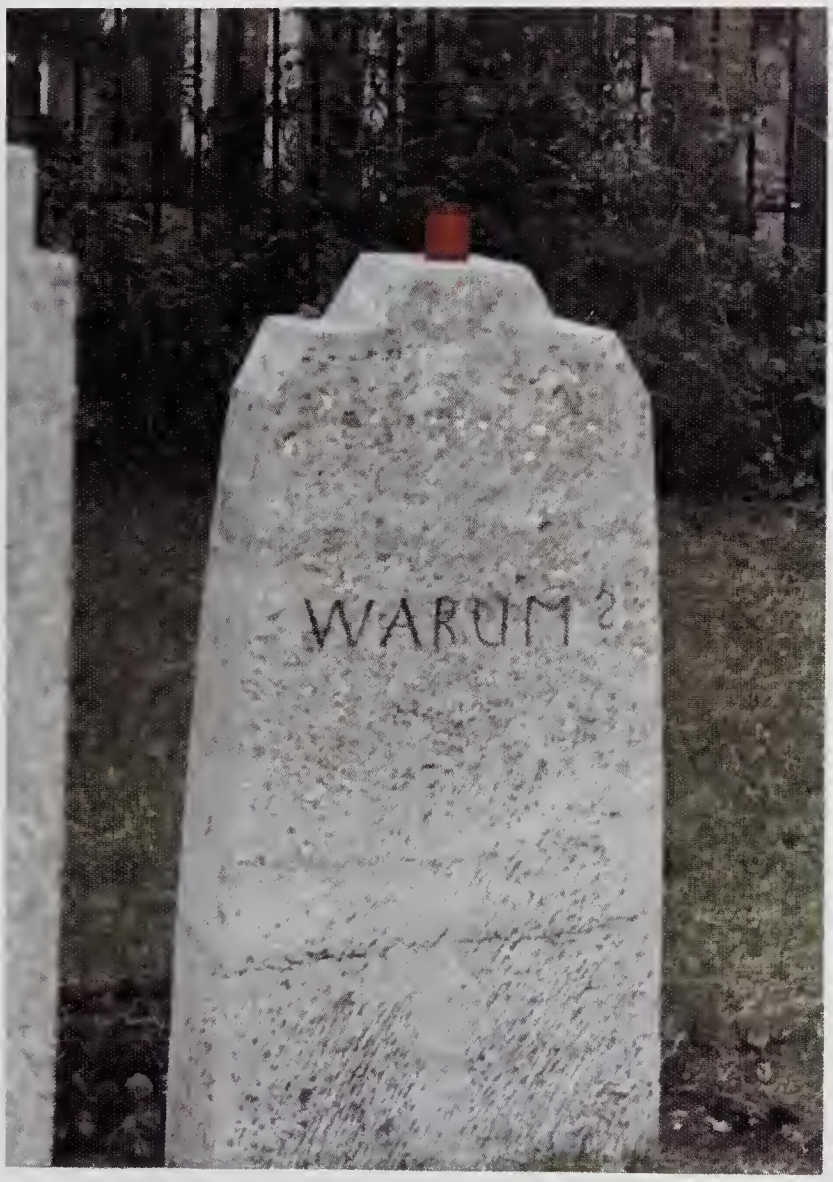
Identification badge for the Russian zone.
Klaus' tattoo number appears on the badge.

Identification papers for Russian zone

Klaus after Liberation in Fuerth, September 1946

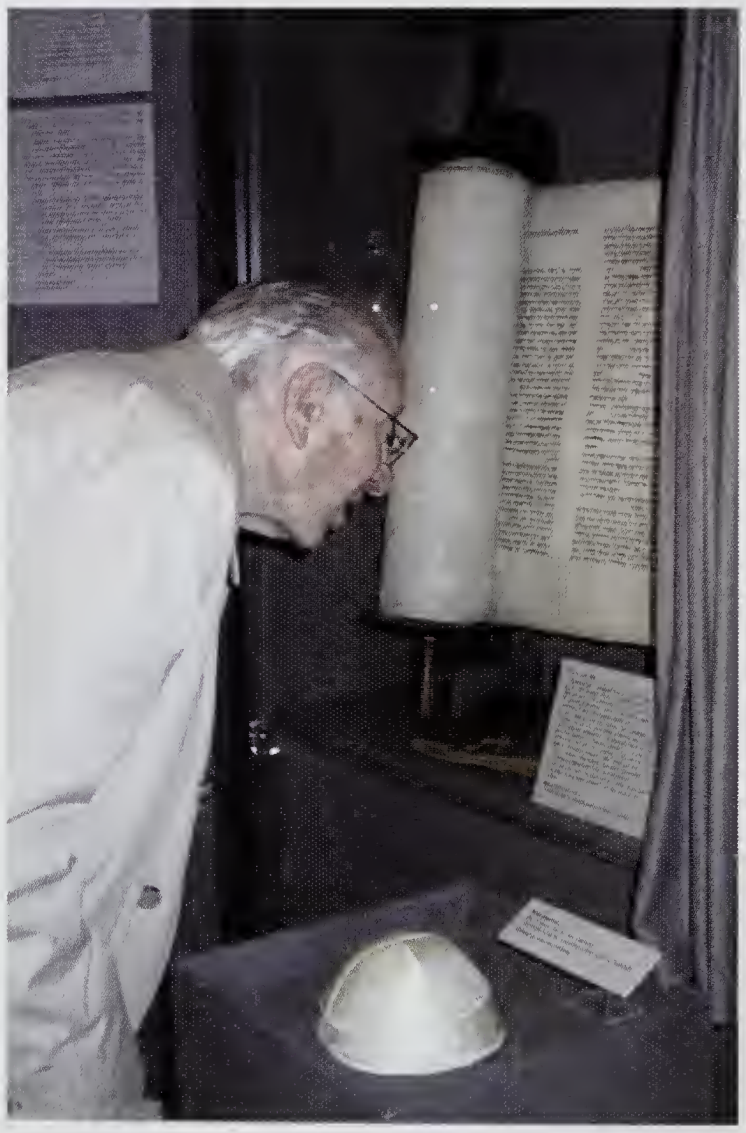
Paula and Klaus after Liberation in Fuerth, September 1946

25th Wedding Anniversary in Seattle



A headstone in Frankfurt, Germany.
"Warum?" means "Why did this all happen?"

Klaus with a memorial in Aurich,
all the names of people who died are engraved, March 2004

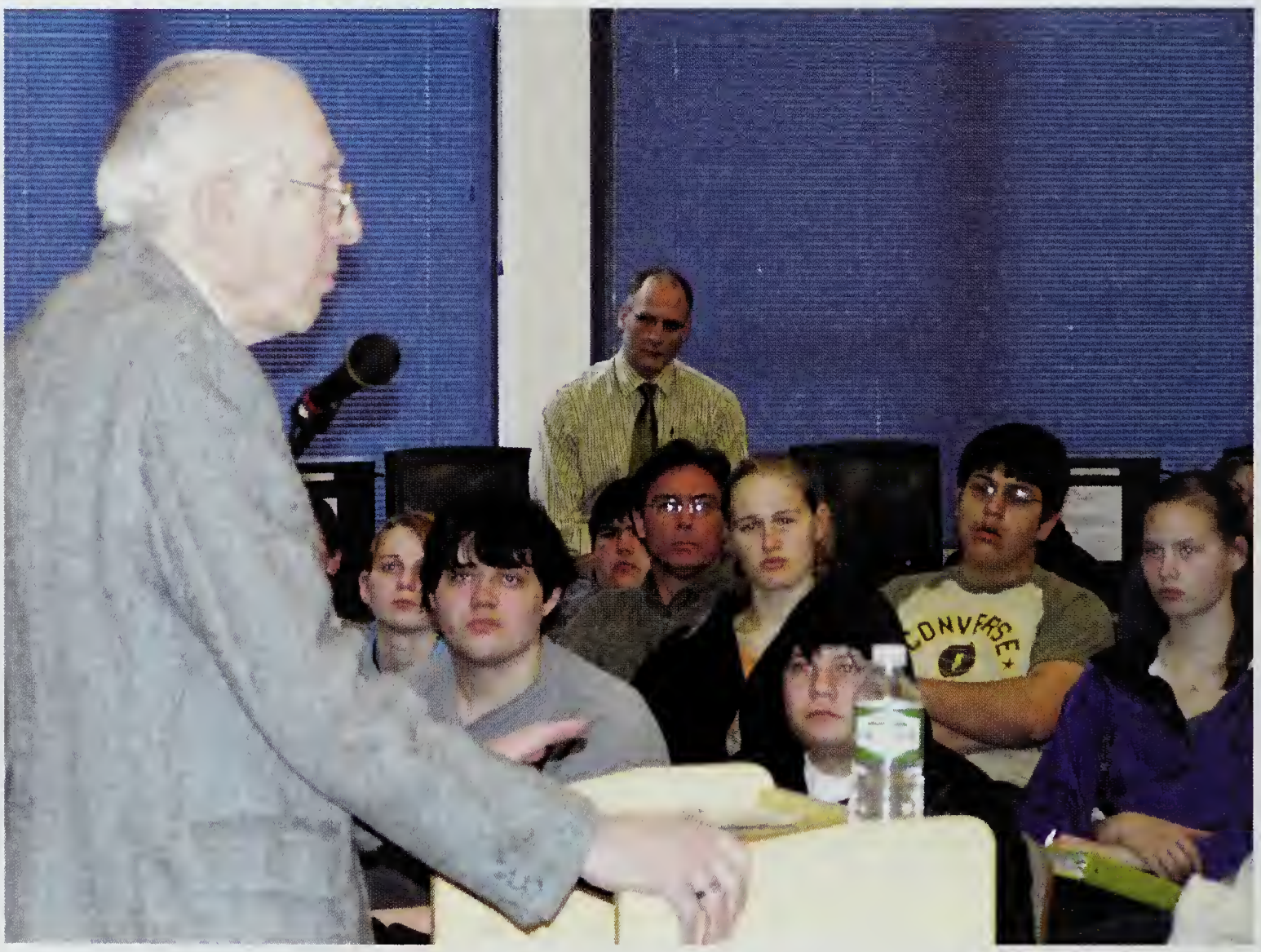


Klaus viewing the Torah that was rescued in 1938
in the history museum in Aurich

Klaus and Paula's son Marvin Stern with his family,
Michelle, Rafi and Shira

Klaus and Paula on their 65th Wedding Anniversary
with their daughter Marion Kitz and her family, Carl, Rebecca and Leah

Klaus showing his tattoo to students



Klaus speaking to students in Sitka, Alaska, April 2007

Distance from Auschwitz III, Buna Monowitz to Muehldorf.
Map courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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Heiratsregister Nr. 5 des Jahres 1941

Heirat

Vornamen und Familienname des Mannes: Hans ...

... Hofbesitzer Hermannsdorf ...

Stand: ... Landwirt Hofbesitzer ...

aus Hermannsdorf b. Lennewitz ...

geboren am 7 ten Mai 1921 in ...

... Hermannsdorf b. Lennewitz ...

Vornamen der Frau: Maria Anna ...

geborene ...

aus Hermannsdorf b. Lennewitz ...

geboren am 23 ten Januar 1922 in ...

... Hermannsdorf b. Lennewitz ...

Eheschließung am 29 ten ...

in Hermannsdorf-Bruchhof ...

(Siegel)

Der Stan